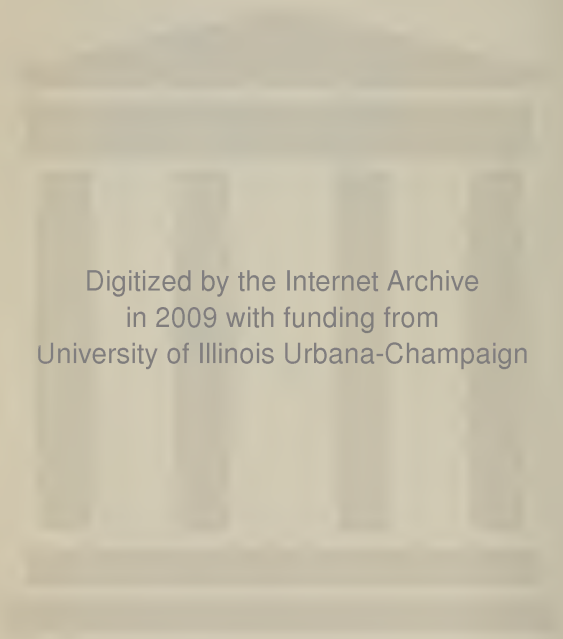




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V I O L E T O S B O R N E.

VOL. I.

VIOLET OSBORNE.

BY

THE LADY EMILY PONSONBY,

AUTHOR OF

“THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,”

“MARY LYNDSEY,”

&c., &c.

“ . . . All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses.”
GEORGE HERBERT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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VIOLET OSBORNE.

CHAPTER I.

“ Even at that age she ruled, a sovereign queen
Over her comrades.”

The Excursion.

“ WHICH of all those charming girls is your daughter, Mrs. Osborne ?” inquired a gentleman of a lady, in whose house a small party was assembled. “ But no, do not tell me ; I like to make people out for myself.”

“ Thank you,” replied Mrs. Osborne, who was a little deaf, and of all this speech, having only heard the word charming, applied it to her party.

The gentleman smiled, and, aware of her infirmity, raised his voice.

“I am trying to make out Miss Osborne. It amuses me to guess people’s situations from their actions, and their characters from their looks. It is Miss Osborne’s birthday to-day, is it not?”

“Yes. Violet begins her life to-day. God grant it may be a happy one!”

There was something touching in the warmth of this speech, contrasting as it did with the calm and inanimate repose deafness had given to Mrs. Osborne’s manner.

“We will at any rate anticipate it for her,” replied her companion kindly; “she is good, I am sure, and, unless for some special purpose it is otherwise ordained, happiness comes to the good.”

“She is good, certainly,” said Mrs. Osborne,

with the same eagerness of speech ; “ she lives only to make others happy.”

“ I have found Miss Osborne !” cried the gentleman, a few moments afterwards. “ Is she not the young lady with red roses in her hair ?”

“ Yes, that is Violet. How did you make her out ?”

“ Because of what you told me. I saw somebody—I had remarked her for some time—thinking first of others and last of number one. I congratulate you on your daughter, Mrs. Osborne ; she is charming. Beautiful, and still more good than beautiful.”

“ You are very kind to say so,” said Mrs. Osborne, much gratified.

At this moment, Violet rushed up to her mother.

“ We are not going to dance, mamma. I find the Lovels think their mother might not

like them to dance so soon after their grandmother's death, and it would be a pity for them to have to sit down."

"But you will be disappointed, dear."

"Oh no, mamma; it does not matter. I was thinking of what we could do. Albert wishes to act charades. I suppose, mamma, you have no objection?"

It was evidently Violet who made arrangements, for she hardly waited for a reply before she kissed her mother's brow, and was hurrying away, when Mrs. Osborne detained her, to introduce her to Mr. Woodrowffe.

"An old friend of mine, Violet, though he has not been in England of late."

Violet did not bow, but frankly gave him her hand.

"A charming girl indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Woodrowffe as she left them; for he was of that age when a little show of gratification in

making his acquaintance—from the young and beautiful at least—pleases a man.

“I am glad you will see her act,” said Mrs. Osborne, who, by this appreciation of her daughter, was won to be confidential. “Violet acts very well.”

“So I should guess. There is life, intelligence, and confidence in her face. She does not look as if she *could* be afraid; and she is right. Why should she? Who is that tall youth beside her? Is that Albert?”

“Yes, he is my nephew. He is an orphan, poor boy, and his only sister, who is married, is lately gone to India. We have him constantly with us. He comes, indeed, whenever he pleases.”

“He has a pleasant countenance, but not a great deal in it; not like Miss Violet. She has a whole history in those dark blue eyes and that brilliant smile. Your daughter’s

beauty would drive an Italian painter mad, Mrs. Osborne. What a skin, and what perfect auburn hair! The very tint the old painters liked, only with a touch more of gold than red."

Of this rhapsody upon her daughter Mrs. Osborne heard little, but she saw by the direction of his eyes that he was commenting on Violet. She therefore smiled and thanked him.

"I am afraid," she added, "that I have been rather unjustifiably praising my own child, but the truth is she is our only one, and we have very few thoughts that are not connected with her."

"No praise so valuable as a mother's!" said her companion, kindly; "for who can know a child as well?"

"True," said Mrs. Osborne, with a slight smile, "but I believe a wise mother should

leave her child's virtues to be discovered. See, they have arranged a charade ! I hope Violet will act," she added, forgetting her late sage observation. " We think she acts so well."

Violet did not act in any of the scenes of the charade. It was well done, but, to Mrs. Osborne and her friend, it was tedious, because the individual they wished to see did not appear.

" Did you like it, mamma ?" Violet inquired, rushing up to her mother when it was concluded.

" Yes, dear, it was very nice ; but we wished, that is, I hoped you would act. You must next time."

" I don't know, mamma. There are a great many good actors here to-night, and I am at home, you know. Perhaps, by-and-by, but don't expect it."

And again kissing her mother's brow, an

action which seemed so habitual as to be unconsciously done, she hastened back to her companions.

Two more charades were performed, and in the last Violet did appear ; but it was in the character of a decrepid old woman, and though the acting was certainly excellent, the disguise was too complete to satisfy her mother or Mr. Woodrowffe.

When the party, with the exception of this old friend and Albert, had dispersed, Mrs. Osborne complained, with some warmth, of her disappointment.

“ But, mamma, it could not be helped,” said her daughter. “ I was at home. You would not have had me take the best parts ? ”

“ Your mamma would have you please yourself, sometimes, darling, instead of always pleasing others ! ” was her father’s fond observation.

“As to that, papa, I please myself best in my own way. How well Margaret Lovel looked as Queen, didn’t she?”

“Yes,” said Albert. “And,” he added, with a boyish wink, “I know somebody who thought she did.”

“Who?” cried Violet, eagerly, expecting some revelation of interest.

“Miss Margaret Lovel,” was his reply, very dryly given. “If young ladies could but know how I see them through and through, they would either leave off deceiving, or practise a little harder to learn how to deceive.”

“Margaret Lovel does not deceive in the least,” said Violet, quickly, “and you are unjust to say so, Albert. If she thinks she is handsome, how can she help it? She can see as well as others.”

“Oh! very well, then, I suppose I am all

wrong. *I* thought the modest thing was for young ladies not to know they were handsome. *I* thought they were to hang their heads like a humble violet ; but that's evidently all trash. Come now, Violet, what do *you* think of yourself? Are you handsome or not? Come, speak, I will have an answer."

"It is a very unfair question, Albert," she said, angrily; "and before a stranger, too; but I don't mean to tell any stories about it. I don't think I am wonderfully handsome, but I know I am not ugly."

"Well, to be sure, the vanity of girls!"

"And their truth," observed Mr. Woodrowffe. "Miss Osborne, I congratulate you on being courageous enough to tell the truth, without regard to consequences."

"You are very kind to take it in that way," said Violet, blushing; "of course I knew to what I exposed myself; but I think a story

is a story, and I never mean to tell one for anything or anybody."

"A wise resolve, Miss Osborne, and a brave one. But I fear I am keeping you all up. Good night."

He made some kind speeches to Mrs. Osborne, and took his departure.

"I will walk with you," cried Albert, following him; "I've a good way to go, and I like company."

"What a fascinating girl your cousin is," observed Mr. Woodrowffe, with energy, as they walked along.

"Yes," he replied, carelessly; "she's a very good girl, but she's terribly spoiled. That father and mother of hers let her govern the house exactly as she pleases."

"Perhaps because she is the fittest person to govern it. If you observe, government usually falls into the hands of the most fit."

“Does it? I am not at all sure of that. Certainly neither my uncle nor aunt will ever die of over-exertion of the intellectual powers; but for all that I think it a great pity that Violet should be ruined.”

“She will not be ruined. You may make your mind quite easy on that point. Good natures are never ruined by freedom, and no one can look in her face and fail to see that she is good.”

“Oh! yes, she’s a good girl, but she’s terribly wilful. But where do you live? This is my way. I’m going to Lincoln’s Inn.”

“I will go a little farther with you. Are you a barrister?”

“Not yet. I am only studying for the bar at présent. I live down there to be in the way, not being fond of early rising.”

“Your studies are dry enough, are they not? How do you like them?”

“Not very much ; but *they* wish me to be a lawyer, and it’s all one to me.”

“Who are *they* ?”

“My uncle. Because he’s a rich banker, he thinks I shall get on at the bar, though what connection the things have together has always passed my comprehension. However, as I said before, it’s all one to me. I make myself agreeable to anything.”

“But it will not be all one if you don’t get on. There’s a future to be considered.”

“To tell you the truth, I don’t intend to be a slave all my life. In a few years I shall marry, and have done with it.”

“An heiress, of course ?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Your cousin, Miss Osborne ?”

“Oh ! dear no, no one in particular. You don’t suppose Violet would ever marry me ? She’s one of the fastidious ones. Does not

mean to marry unless she finds every perfection under the sun. I shall find her a husband one of these days, but not for three or four years. I think it's a bad plan for girls to marry too early ; besides, it's much better fun to have her at home."

"True. I suppose Miss Osborne is so far fortunate that she need not consider fortune a necessary perfection."

"So far from it, that one of her great perfections is poverty ; but then you know Violet has plenty of money, and I must say she likes to have the upper hand."

"Most women do, they say in the old ballad."

"Then if most like it in a degree, Violet likes it four times over that degree. I suppose you have a right to know all the family affairs?" he asked, suddenly.

"Well," said his companion, smiling, "I

don't know that I have any right, and perhaps I ought to beg your pardon for my inquisitiveness. It is a quality that is always excited when I take a fancy to a person, as I did to your cousin to-night. However, you may be quite easy. All your secrets shall go back with me to India, and there be buried."

"Thank you ; not that I have said anything I would not say to their faces ; but it's not pleasant to have remarks on one's relations repeated back again."

"I quite agree with you. And now good night, and my best wishes regarding the heiress you mentioned."

"That will not be for some years to come ; but I am very much obliged to you all the same. Good night." And they went on their separate ways.

"A good-natured old soul, with a yellow face !" was Albert's soliloquy as he sauntered

along. "In love with Violet, evidently—all old men are!"

"A well-meaning boy, with an empty head," was Mr. Woodrowffe's. "He'll never do at the bar."

CHAPTER II.

“A mind by nature indisposed to ought
So placid, so inactive as content.”

The Excursion.

“I HEARD you say you were going to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy to-morrow afternoon, Violet,” said Albert to his cousin one evening, two years after the date of the last chapter. “May I go with you?”

“Certainly. We shall like it, shall we not, mamma? Be here at four o’clock, and we will take you. But this is a new fancy, Albert? I never knew you to care about pictures before.”

“One need not care because one wants to

go. Everybody is going. Besides, I suppose one may sometimes fancy a new thing. People don't always run in the same track. They would be nice ignoramusses if they did."

"You have no reason, then, for wishing to go?" Violet persisted, looking as if she was convinced he had.

"None in particular. Leicester went the other day, and talked about the pictures, and so I thought I should like to go."

Violet laughed and nodded; but Albert, not observing her, went on—

"He says there is a little picture there that nobody seems to notice, which is worth all the others put together."

"And who made Mr. Leicester a supreme judge of pictures?" Violet asked, ironically.

"His own good taste, I suppose. I cannot tell why it is, Violet, but you seem to have no

pleasure so great as cutting up Leicester. I see no fun in it at all."

"Mr. Leicester does provoke me, I own. Always forming strange opinions, and setting up his opinion against the world."

"Leicester setting himself up against the world!" exclaimed Albert, in surprise and indignation. "What extraordinary fancies you do have! Leicester, who is too shy, poor fellow, to express his opinions at all, and only neglected because he is too humble and diffident to allow his merit to be seen."

"Mr. Leicester shy and diffident! My dear Albert, I am quite tired of hearing all the strange things he says."

"He talks to *me* because I like to hear him; but he talks to very few besides, because most people are too full of themselves to draw him out. He never says strange things, and if I tire you, it is my fault, not his. *He* never

tired anybody, poor fellow ; and since you are so unjust, Violet, I will never mention him—though he is my best friend—any more.”

He spoke with so much warmth, that Violet’s interest was excited.

“ Why do you say neglected, Albert ?” she asked. “ Mr. Leicester is a lawyer, is he not ? I suppose he will get on in his turn as others do.”

“ He is neglected because he is too shy to put himself forward. I don’t suppose there is such a modest, retiring man in Europe ; but it’s only for a time. He’s too clever to be overlooked, and some day, poor fellow, he will be appreciated as he ought to be.”

During Albert’s last two speeches a very singular change took place in Violet’s mind. She had hitherto—without knowing Mr. Leicester—indulged in an antipathy to him, simply because her cousin appeared to look up to

him. She had set him down in her vivid imagination as a young, intolerable prig; and as such, a proper object for her dislike and sarcasm. But there was that in her nature which ever stood up for the oppressed, and stooped down to the neglected. Observers, who were very desirous to discover the flaws in human virtue, would have said this disposition sprang from the love of patronizing and of power; and undoubtedly this was Violet's temptation. But the fault had wound about the virtue after it had grown up; the root was in her own generous and kindly nature. Albert's few words regarding the fortunes of his friend, dispelled him from her fancy in his first priggish form, and a new vision of a young retiring genius springing up in its place, all her sympathies became enlisted in his favour. In less than a minute the transformation from dislike to interest was effected, and she began

to plan kindnesses to encourage modest merit.

“Do you think Mr. Leicester would go with us to the Exhibition to-morrow, Albert?” she inquired, after a short silence. “We could take him as well as you, and it would be a means of making acquaintance. I feel sorry for him after what you have said.”

“I am sure he would,” said Albert, delighted. “I think I can answer for that. He knows you all too well from my description to be shy about it; or if he is, I can soon persuade him. All he wants, poor fellow, is for people to come forward to meet him. Do you know, Violet, I have so often wished you would notice him.”

“Then why did you never say so?” she asked with quickness.

“Because I did not choose. He is a great deal too good to force upon anybody. If you did not like to know him, I did not wish you

to know him. But I am very much obliged to you now."

"Mamma," cried Violet, approaching her mother and kissing her, "you will not mind our taking Albert's friend with us to-morrow, shall you? I have told him you will."

The question was asked with Violet's accustomed dutiful attention to her mother; but it was a mere form. Mrs. Osborne had no will but her daughter's.

The two years that had passed had brought its natural changes to both Violet and Albert. The manners of both had lost their first marked freshness, and been toned into the softer manners of common life. With Albert the change ended here. He was in mind still a boy; careless and wayward, yet with good dispositions, and some shrewd perceptions into men and things. He had lately been called to the bar, and he dawdled away a large por-

tion of his time among lawyers and law books ; attending trials and propounding questions ; snatching up, with instinctive quickness, many pieces of valuable information, but eschewing all the profounder parts of the profession on which he had entered.

With Violet the changes had gone deeper. At seventeen she had been a lively, sweet-tempered, wilful girl—a spoilt child, *unspoilt* ; at nineteen she was a woman, with a woman's thought and feeling ; lively, sweet-tempered, and wilful still, but thinking much, and questioning her thoughts. She had passed through the severe ordeal of two seasons as a reigning beauty ; rich, lovely, and inviting in manner ; sought, flattered, and loved. But the spoiled beauty was like the spoiled child, *unspoilt* ! She did not think little of herself ; she knew she was very charming ; thought so, and rejoiced in the thought ; but the knowledge

exercised no influence on her mind and manners. She was as simple and honest as when a child ; as careless of herself, as thoughtful for others, as earnestly desirous to do what she considered right, and to be all that she ought to be. If her standard was not high, it was true, and truth is the best of foundations.

Violet expected, with some interest, the arrival of Albert and his friend. She was at the age when fancy is busy, and of the temperament when it is vivid ; and fancy gives to the simplest events of life an importance of its own. With a disappointment, therefore, most disproportioned to the real importance of the circumstance, she saw Albert arrive alone.

“ Well, Albert, and where is Mr. Leicester ? ” she said eagerly.

Albert, not having given to the invitation

as much thought as Violet had, answered, indifferently :

“ Oh ! he was very sorry, Violet, but he could not come.”

Violet coloured.

“ Of all things I hate,” she said, with warmth, “ it is for people to break their engagements !”

“ It was no engagement, Violet ; that is, it was none of his. He was very sorry, and very much obliged, and would have liked it, but he was particularly busy to-day, and could not help himself. You must ask him another time.”

The vision of the modest youth and bashful genius faded from Violet’s fancy, and the intolerable prig resumed his place.

“ I see Mr. Leicester is just what I thought he was !” she observed, quickly ; “ gives himself airs to make his importance felt. I am

very glad he did not come, for I know I should hate him."

"Leicester give himself airs! Poor fellow! What extraordinary fancies you do have! I say, Violet, I think you are the oddest mixture I ever knew! There is nobody more good-natured than you can be, but, at the same time, I know nobody so ill-natured, or so easily vexed, if people don't receive your kindnesses just as they are meant. You should learn to be more calm, and not flurry about trifles."

Violet's truthful conscience told her he was right. She could not bear the shadow of ingratitude, and was certainly prone to expect large returns for her kindnesses. She coloured angrily, but refrained from the sharp words she would willingly have returned to this plain-spoken admonition.

Without being a connoisseur, Violet was

fond of painting, and had an instinctive appreciation of what was good. She and her mother—the eyes of the latter instructed by her daughter—went slowly through the rooms of the Exhibition, leisurely examining such good things as were to be seen. Albert lounged about by himself, discovering what was good and what was bad, without one rule of art to guide him.

“Come here!” he exclaimed, suddenly coming up to Violet in the second room. “I have found the thing Leicester likes, and I want you to look at it. It’s a very good thing, and you will like it too.”

Assuring him she should *not* like it, Violet followed him. The picture was called in the catalogue, “Ruth’s First-born Son;” and the subject was treated with a grave simplicity and pathos, which, while it glaringly attracted no attention, riveted attention when once it

was caught. The position of Naomi, bearing away the child as her own; the glad thankfulness in the eyes of the young mother; and something of awe and prophecy in those of Boaz as they followed it—were depicted with a master's hand; yet such a master's hand as seemed unconscious of the effect he produced; homely and harmonious, without effort or caprice.

Violet looked, and was touched. She had expected some eccentricity of genius, some strange thing which the young prig had chosen to patronise. She could not conceal her surprise.

“Yes,” she replied, in answer to Albert's inquiry, “it is very pretty, but I don't understand why Mr. Leicester likes it. It is not at all the sort of thing I should have expected a young man to choose.”

“A young man, my dear Violet, has quite

as good taste as a young woman, I can assure you," said Albert, with dignity.

"I mean that I wonder at the subject interesting him. It is all so simple, and all about a baby."

"But there may be particular thoughts about the baby, and there are. I can see that myself. The baby was something or somebody, I am pretty sure; and they seem all to be thinking about it."

"Yes—so he was," said Violet, thoughtfully, "the grandfather of David, and therefore yes—I see what you mean. Still I am surprised. It is not at all what I should have expected Mr. Leicester to like. And I am very sorry, too," she added, laughing, "because I agree with him in liking it best, and that is very disagreeable to me."

"Why?—I don't see why," said stupid Albert.

“ Because I hate him, and I don’t want to agree with people I hate. But come with us now to the miniatures ; we have not much more time, and we must look at them before we go.”

In the miniature room another surprise awaited her, regarding the individual who seemed suddenly destined to engage her thoughts.

“ Who is that, Albert ?” she exclaimed, pointing to a crayon head above the rows of miniatures ; “ I think it must be *somebody*, and I like it.”

It was the head of a man ; not an intellectual abstraction, not a poetical study, but a man, seeming to live and breathe on the canvas. The features of the face were marked and strong, yet the expression of countenance was very soft, and there was something in the grave sweetness of the dark eyes which

arrested the spectator with a force he could not withstand.

“Why, it’s Leicester!—it must be!” cried Albert, seizing the catalogue. “Yes—sure enough—‘John Leicester, Esq.’ Well, this is the most extraordinary thing I ever knew!”

“*That* Mr. Leicester?” exclaimed Violet, almost stupefied with her surprise.

“Yes, and a capital likeness—the very man! But what I can’t understand is, how it comes to be here. I should have thought he was the last man in the world who would have made an exhibition of himself.”

“That is true,” said a voice behind them, proceeding from a pale, clever-looking young man; “but Mr. Leicester never refuses a boon to a person in distress. I asked him to sit to me, and he consented; and having succeeded beyond my hopes, he allowed me to make of my study such use as I could.”

Violet was startled at this sudden explanation ; but Albert, who, with the exception of this picture's appearance, was never surprised at anything, quietly replied,

“Thank you ; that is just like him. I hope it has been of use to you.”

“It has already in some degree ; and as, since its appearance here, it has been approved by very competent judges, I have good hope that it will be still more so. But do not let me interrupt you,” and bowing, the young man disappeared.

“We ought to be careful how we speak in a crowd,” said Albert, composedly.

“So I have been quite wrong !” said Violet. “I thought Mr. Leicester was a young man.”

“Young !—why, so he is. Do you call two-and-thirty old ?”

“I call it a very good age ; not the least

bit of a *boy*," and there was contempt in the emphasis. "But, Albert, what puzzles me is this : if Mr. Leicester is, as he seems to be, such a very *superior* person, how does he come to be your friend ?"

"Ah ! Violet," said Albert, nodding his head, "you are quite in the wrong box. It is not your clever people who appreciate superior characters—they are too full of themselves to care. I may not be very clever, but I know what is worth liking better than clever ones do."

"I believe you mean to give me a hint," said Violet, laughing. "I daresay I am a great deal too full of myself, and think myself much cleverer than I am ; but if you suppose I do not appreciate superior people, you are wrong. Goodness and worth is what I look for, as a jeweller hunts for diamonds ; and when I find a grain of goodness, I feel as elated as

the jeweller does. So now I want to make acquaintance with Mr. Leicester, and you must bring him to us."

"I will manage it," replied Albert, with dignity. "But you must remember he is shy, and not be surprised if you find him dull at first."

"He will not be shy with me. No one is. So, Albert, it is a settled thing, and don't let me be disappointed. But, dear mamma!" she suddenly exclaimed, "how I have been talking, and how tired of standing you must be!"

"Not at all, dear. I like to look about me, and that," pointing to the crayon head which had occupied so much of the conversation of her companions, "is a very pleasing countenance. Look in the catalogue and see whose picture it is."

Albert, who never could become accustomed

to his aunt's infirmity, stared at this request ;
but Violet obeyed, and gave the information
she desired.

CHAPTER III.

“ ’Tis a common tale,
A tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed
In bodily form.”

The Excursion.

MR. LEICESTER, at Violet's request, was invited to dine with Mr. Osborne a few days afterwards. Having heedlessly put himself into Albert's hands for the occasion, and Albert rarely attaining to the virtue of punctuality, the company had sat down to dinner before he arrived. Violet was much vexed at this *contretemps*; but punctuality was a point dear to Mr. Osborne; his time and tide, though forced, he said, occasionally to wait for a woman, waited for no *man*.

With cordial kindness, however, on Leicester's entrance, he went to meet the stranger, and set him, as he hoped, at ease, by directing him to a vacant seat ; but the vacant seat was far from Violet, and as, except in her mind, no particular interest was felt regarding the stranger, he remained silent during the principal part of dinner.

When he first appeared, observing his tall and dignified figure, and the countenance on which, though remarkably handsome, the seal of middle age was lightly set, she blushed as she thought of her destined purposes of kindly encouragement ; but before dinner was over, they had been formed anew—the very same purposes, only with much more interest and much more zeal. And this because his diffidence even during that hour had become apparent to her eyes. When addressed by her father from a distance, which happened twice

in the course of dinner, she had seen him colour, as a young girl in his circumstances might have done ; and though his answers were given with great composure, he sank back with an appearance of relief when allowed to relapse into obscurity again.

All the guests except Leicester were at home in the house ; and when they appeared in the drawing-room, disposed of themselves with easy unconcern. But he was a stranger, and alone, and with the perversity common to shy strangers, he placed himself on a seat whose inaccessible position cut him off from notice.

There is in Miss Edgeworth's novel of "Patronage" a description of what is there called *mauvaise honte*. She says of one of her characters :

"He was subject to that nightmare of the soul who sits herself upon the human breast,

oppresses the heart, palsies the will, and raises spectres of dismay, which the sufferer combats in vain ; that cruel enchantress, who hurls her spell even upon childhood, and when she makes the youth her victim, pronounces—

“ ‘Henceforward you shall never appear in your natural character ; innocent, you shall look guilty—wise, you shall look silly. That which you wish to say, you shall not say ; that which you wish to do, you shall not do ; you shall appear reserved, when you are enthusiastic—insensible, when your heart sinks in melting tenderness,’ ” &c., &c.

The passage speaks of an extreme case, and is highly coloured ; yet in its general features it as truly as forcibly describes the common trials of a shy man. John Leicester was one of this unhappy race. With talents above the average, with personal advantages which alone would have brought most men into

notice, an unaccountable diffidence had laid its frozen hand upon his soul. The world in general is too busy to observe those who withdraw themselves from notice ; but even among those who did observe, Leicester was misunderstood. He had, by the exertion of common sense and by natural strength of character, so far conquered his shyness as to subdue some of its outward signs. He had learnt not to stand waving his tall body, as many shy men do, when a seat would set him at ease ; he taught himself to go through the common forms of society, and to speak common forms of speech with a grave composure which concealed his inward trepidation ; but the very conquest of outward weaknesses made him but the more liable to be misunderstood ; and, while it displaced pity, brought criticism in its stead. He was called proud, when often he would have been thankful for a child's notice ; cold

and indifferent, when his heart was beating with sympathy; dull and apathetic, when, had he dared to speak, his words would have won golden opinions from men. He knew his infirmity, and owned his weakness; but knowledge brought neither strength nor comfort; he felt his bonds, but could not burst them.

Thus it was that in general, as Albert had said, he was neglected and overlooked. He could not put himself forward, and no kindly feeling went forward to drag him out; and thus too it was that, neglect acting and reacting upon his character, he withdrew further and further from notice, into the solitude of his own soul.

Whether shyness proceeds from pride or humility is a question often asked; and since it probably proceeds from both, will be often disputed. It is a very true humility that causes a poor soul to doubt of its powers to

please ; that causes it—comparing itself with other more gifted beings—sadly to feel that the charm of attraction is wanting. But it is pride that makes it acquiesce in this want of attraction ; and, rather than seem to court a notice not freely given, to hide for ever the gifts it is conscious it does possess. The different ingredients are variously blended in different characters ; in some, pride prevails ; in some, humility ; but probably both are necessary to produce shyness in any aggravated form. In Leicester, the humility was very genuine. The talents that were overlooked by others, he overlooked himself ; and in the power to attract, he was but too painfully conscious of a deficiency. But though thus genuinely humble, it was also true that pride was slumbering in no small proportion within.

After waiting in the vain hope and expec-

tation that he would approach her during the evening, Violet at length summoned Albert, and said :

“ I cannot bear to see Mr. Leicester sit there by himself. I must go to him—or you, Albert, must bring him to me. Which shall it be ? ”

“ I will bring him to you,” replied Albert, discreetly. “ It was my being so late that put him out to-night. If we had been in time he would have made acquaintance, and all would have been easy before now.”

“ It shall soon be easy,” said Violet, confidently. “ But what a strange thing it is to see such a man so shy ! It surpasses my understanding.”

“ Come, along Leicester,” exclaimed Albert, approaching his friend, “ my cousin wishes to make your acquaintance, so lay aside that newspaper, and follow me.”

He arose at once, very thankful, in truth, for the notice that brought him out of his self-chosen, yet awkward position.

“There,” continued Albert, pushing him with easy familiarity into a chair, “now be comfortable, do ! I was telling Violet that you were very much ashamed and put out by being so late ; but what can’t be helped is best forgotten. It is of no importance now.”

“It was not a very civil way, on our side, I mean, of beginning an acquaintance,” said Violet, laughing ; “but we shall be all the better friends for beginning uncivilly.”

The ease and friendliness of her manner thawed Leicester’s frost-bound powers, and he became himself.

After a little conversation, Albert, overhearing a discussion between his uncle and another gentleman, regarding a disputed will,

walked off to give his attention to, and his opinion on, the subject, leaving Leicester and Violet to themselves.

“I am so glad to have seen you, Mr. Leicester,” she began, with a manner that, in some, might have been over-forward, but in her was only characteristic ; “for you must know that you have been my enemy for some months !”

“How so ?” he asked, with a smiling surprise.

“Only from perversity, I believe. Albert chose to look up to you, and to quote your opinions, and, in consequence, I pictured to myself a very disagreeable image of what his friend must be ; a very different one, in short, to the reality.”

“Ellis and I are great friends,” he observed, quietly.

“Where did you make acquaintance with

Albert?" she asked, suddenly. "I have never heard."

He was silent for a moment, then replied :

"Ellis is so much younger than I am that there can be nothing strange in my telling you that our acquaintance arose out of a piece of advice I one night gave him ; which he—in- stead of resenting, as many would have done at his age—accepted as it was intended. We have been great friends ever since."

"Great friends, I am sure, from Albert's account ; but it surprises me still ; in fact, I cannot understand it. You must be so different."

"Friendships spring much more from circumstances than rules," he said, smiling. "You must have hard work if you try to account for all the fancies and intimacies of all your friends."

"Never so hard work as now," Violet did

not say, but thought to herself ; for she could see no possible ground of union between the grave, thoughtful man, and the good-natured, shallow boy.

“Do you go out much, Mr. Leicester?” she presently inquired.

“Never for my own pleasure—sometimes as chaperon.”

“As chaperon!” and Violet almost screamed in her surprise.

“Well, I daresay I look like an awkward chaperon,” he observed, with a smile ; “but a man must do what falls to his lot, nevertheless.”

“Indeed, that was not what surprised me ; I am only surprised at your being so different to the fancy I had formed of Albert’s friend. But who do you take under your chaperonage?”

“My sisters. Two accept of me when they

can get no better—one is kind enough to say that she prefers me to others.”

“Albert never told me you had sisters.”

“I have five ; but only three go out into the world.”

“And what do you do as chaperon ?” Violet asked, laughingly.

“I do the best I can,” he said, with a kind of quiet humour. “I lean my back against the wall when I am not wanted ; I move when I am desired ; sometimes I walk down to supper and up again ; and once I extricated my sister from a dilemma respecting a disagreeable partner—but this, she said, was so awkwardly done, that I have since been spared any active business.”

“And does it bore you very much ?”

“No, indeed, I am never bored.”

“It would amuse me beyond anything to have a girl to take care of,” said Violet,

laughing. "I think, when I am old enough, I shall advertise myself as a chaperon. The only fear would be that I should wish too much, and plan too much."

"Yes, that is the danger," he remarked gravely. "An unoccupied observer—for I am an inactive chaperon—sees many plots passing under his eyes."

"Does he?" she asked eagerly. "I wish I was an observer; but I am too busy myself to see much of what others do. What do you see?"

"Some things that please me, some that I had rather not see—but I only observe. It would not do for an observer to be a reporter."

"I should like to meet you out in the world," said Violet, frankly.

The eager speech, the implied expression of pleasure in his society, so natural to her to

speech, so uncommon for his ears to hear, affected him in a way she could never have imagined possible. It gave him inwardly indeed a strange thrill of pleasure, but its outward effect was to make him nervously draw back into himself.

It also caused something to slip from his hands and fall at her feet. She stooped and picked it up. She had observed that while he conversed with her, his fingers were engaged in fidgeting with a piece of paper ; the result of the fidgeting, as she raised it from the ground, drew from her an exclamation of wonder ;

“ Mr. Leicester, did you really make this ? ”

It was the minute form of a little monkey, pinched and twisted into the most perfect proportions.

“ Yes, I believe I did,” he replied, colouring deeply. “ I hope I have destroyed

nothing—I really was not aware what I was doing.”

Too full of curiosity and pleasure to remember how much he might dislike to be brought into notice, Violet called to her father to admire.

“A perfect little monkey,” Mr. Osborne observed, examining the small creature through his glasses, as a naturalist examines a plant.

“And five minutes ago the little thing was an old letter,” said Violet. “I call it wonderful, Mr. Leicester.”

Her exclamations drew the rest of the company to the spot, and, as is customary, the expressions of admiration were beyond what the occasion required, especially from the female part of the assembly. Leicester looked as if he had been found guilty of some crime.

For the truth was, the production of the little creature was a weakness, and he knew

it. It was the effect of a nervous temperament, which laid hold on any employment which drew him from himself. Again and again he had resolved to be guilty of the weakness no more ; but in vain. In shy moments no piece of paper ever came in his way without bearing the traces of his hands. That his productions were full of genius, that other men would have used them to win attention and admiration, was nothing to him. In his eyes they were memorials of his weakness, and nothing more.

“Put the thing down—do, Violet,” whispered Albert, angrily, in her ear ; “can’t you see how you bore him ?”

Violet glanced her eyes towards Leicester, and saw it.

“Tea is ready,” she remarked with quickness. “Give me my treasure, and let us go.”

And taking it from some hand, she opened a drawer, and tossed it in.

“I make tea myself in an old-fashioned way,” she said to Leicester as she passed, anxious to put him at his ease; “I hope you will have some.”

He followed with Albert. But it was not at Violet’s tea-table that he or such as he could ever shine. It was famed for its agreeableness by the habitual guests of the house; and the party, from the spirit and vivacity that reigned around it, was sometimes prolonged to a late hour in the evening. Courted and admired by all, Violet had no shyness; and while her own liveliness and playfulness gave the spring to conversation, the kindness with which she drew others out, and made much of what others said, set all at ease, and made most men happy.

But that which is inspiriting to some is de-

pressing to others ; that which gives wings to some, even laggard tongues, lays leaden chains on those of others. Leicester had rarely felt so intensely wretched, so densely dull as during this hour. He knew that Albert wished him to make the best of himself ; he saw—it needed no keen perception to see—that Violet was anxious to make him at home and happy ; but, though touched by her kindness, gratitude was powerless to untie the fetter that bound him down. He remained speechless ; a burden to himself, and to others.

Violet was vexed, but she had never felt so great an interest in any agreeable member of society as she now did in this shy man. Her love of protecting, perhaps, came strongly into play, but it was united with interest of a totally different kind.

When the party broke up, Albert lingered

behind to make some arrangements with his uncle. He desired Leicester to wait for him, and the latter did so, placing himself once again in the most impracticable seat he could find, and this, notwithstanding an earnest desire to behave rationally, and to remove the impression his silence might have caused.

But Violet was not to be daunted; and, moving from one chair to another, she addressed him.

“I forgot to tell you, Mr. Leicester, how much we liked your picture. I mean the picture in the Exhibition, which Albert says is your favourite.”

“I am glad you did,” he replied, rising at once, and approaching her with a look of pleasure; “then I suppose I was right in the opinion I gave.”

“Not because I admire it, for I am no judge, that is, no good judge of what is good.

But you are right, because the thing *is* pretty, and your opinion needs no confirmation."

"It is at all events pleasant to be agreed with."

"Sometimes; but it is also pleasant to be disagreed with. I like a good fight."

"Agreement is more to my taste," he said, smiling; "when the world goes against me, I am apt to mistrust my strongest opinions."

"And yet in your profession I should have thought *convincing* was the greatest of pleasures."

"Ah! yes—convincing! I was not thinking of that. To convince is a rare pleasure, and worth a good fight, certainly."

"And I never thought of defeat," replied Violet, laughing; "it is a thing whose existence I deny."

"Then you are a great fool, Violet," said Albert, joining them, "for one side must be

defeated. Come, Leicester, if you are ready, I am."

"I hope we shall soon have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mr. Leicester," said Mr. Osborne; while Leicester stood silent, feeling he ought to make some acknowledgment for the kindness which had prompted his invitation.

"Thank you—good night," was, however, all he said, and they departed.

"I asked Mr. Leicester to come again, Violet, because I saw in your face that you wished me to do so," said her father; "but I confess Albert's friend appears to have but little to say for himself."

"He will say more when we know him better, papa. I like him very much."

"Then I will like him, too," said the fond father; "outward manners are often deceiving. He may be clever enough within."

Meanwhile Albert strolled homewards with his friend.

“Well, Leicester,” he exclaimed, after waiting a very short time for an opinion to be expressed, “how did you like Violet?”

“You are too hasty, Ellis,” was the reply ; “I have not had time to think.”

“How I do hate people who give a correct reply,” said Albert ; “to be sure, it takes a world of thought to see whether a woman is pretty or not.”

“Oh ! as to beauty, I can answer at once ; a child could see she was beautiful.”

“And not conscious of it—is she ? Know it of course she does, but she does not seem to think about it.”

“Not in the least.”

“Then you do like her, I think.”

“I must give you another correct reply,” he said, smiling ; “to tell you the truth, I

admired your cousin too much to feel satisfied to say I *liked* her, when you asked the question. That answer does for a common, good-tempered girl. Miss Osborne is much more than that. Even now, if you repeat the question, I cannot say yes."

"Very well; be as roundabout as ever you please. I see you like her, and I am quite satisfied. I know what she thought of you—I mean I *saw*," he added, discreetly.

"If she thought at all," he said, with sadness, "she must have wondered why so dull a soul ever burdened society with his presence."

"No, she did not; she is too clear-sighted for that. But, I must say, Leicester, you did not do your best. You looked as if you were going to be hanged. I can excuse it when people are careless and neglectful, but when everybody was bent on making you comfortable"

“Very true,” he interrupted, quickly, “but it is not worth discussing. Here we are at No. —; it is too late to ask you to come in. Good night.”

And opening the door of a house in Clarges Street, Leicester entered, and Albert went on his way.

CHAPTER IV.

“ . . . Selfishness

May not come near him, nor the little throng
Of flitting pleasures tempt him from his path.”

The Prelude.

BUT when Albert was out of sight, Leicester reissued from the door, and walked up and down in the bright moonlight, almost till the break of day. He was in a mood of mind which sometimes attacked him ; a mood at once of excitement and depression ; of depression *because* excited ; a mood of mind in which his life's prospects pressed heavily, and when the icy chain which severed him from his kind hung round him like a fetter of lead.

There had been a time—it was in Leices-

ter's early youth—when his shyness had found relief in society beneath him, and when the dangers which attend that relief had appeared to be closing around him, leading, or rather dragging him into temptation. But these perils were dissipated, and the chain of evil habits and lowering associations, broken at once and for ever by the death of his father, when he was twenty-four years old. At his death he found himself left as sole guardian to five sisters, all younger than himself; and the responsibility imposed upon him bound him for ever.

Mr. Leicester, the father, had held a legal office, which allowed him to bring up his family in comfort and even in affluence. His death was sudden, and cut him off while yet only on the borders of age; but though sudden, his cares for his children had provided for a change, and the arrangements he had made

were such as a father's foresight had deemed the best. His daughters were motherless, and at the age most needing careful guardianship. His only son was, as has been said, involved in dangers which might lead to a loss of character and respectability. Had he taken advice, the wisest counsellor might have said, "appoint another and safer guardian for your motherless children." But Mr. Leicester had looked with keen discrimination into his son's character. He trusted him while his steps were wandering from the right way. He left to him all he possessed, with the simple request that he would be a father to his sisters, and provide for and watch over them as their father would have done.

It was a heavy responsibility for so young a man. Young married men grow with the growth of their family, and every year is a school of experience for the year that is to

follow ; but on Leicester the burden of a full-grown family was suddenly laid. He felt the burden, and with natural diffidence felt also his inability to perform the task ; but not the less he set himself to it, shaking himself free from old temptations, putting aside other hopes and cares ; gravely and sadly, but nobly and honourably, and with all his heart. His father had rightly judged of him.

A house in Clarges Street, and eight hundred a year ; this was what his father had left to him, in charge for his sisters ; to educate the younger, to give comforts and pleasures to the elder, to lay by for future portions, or sudden emergencies ; to shield them all, as far as in him lay, from the disappointments and cares which their reduced income and change of life must naturally bring. These had been his ceaseless thoughts for eight long years ; thoughts so engrossing that his own selfish

existence had seem to pass out of sight, that hope or joy in life—except as connected with their welfare—had vanished, or seemed to vanish from his imagination, and from theirs also. One separate existence alone he had, and this was in his legal studies, vigorously pursued for their benefit and his own, but, so far as yet appeared, pursued without end or hope.

Beneath these cares and studies life had flowed by him with a heavy step ; slight tints of grey were visible in his dark hair, and furrows lightly streaked his broad high brow ; while an expression of melancholy, not oppressive, but gentle and subdued, seemed the expression natural to his countenance.

In some respects the charge that had been laid upon him operated disadvantageously on his character. His natural gravity increased ; thought drew him further and further from

the animating scenes of life, and habit set its fatal seal on a diffidence that once might have been overcome. The absence of selfish hopes and fears in some degree dulled the outward man, depriving him of those qualities which the world sees and hears of, which win and attract the many, and which are twice blessed ; blessing those who have, and those who see them. But, though he suffered under this disadvantage, there was compensation, and far more than compensation within ; as much more as the gifts of the moral nature are above the graces of the outward man. He had that within that passed show ; a mind in which every evil thought or desire was conquered through the desire to be worthy of his trust ; a mind refined and purified even as he wished to guard his sisters innocent and pure ; a mind from which man's strongest enemy—self-love—was, through the love of others, as

nearly banished as perhaps in human nature it is possible to be. And, as years passed on, silently and almost unconsciously a diviner principle was growing up. He felt his weakness to be and do all that a father might and should—that picture of a father which he had set before himself, sublimated, perhaps, beyond any human model, so watchful, so far-seeing, so tender in sympathy, so long-suffering with infirmity—and as man, frail and infirm, must do when once fully conscious of his weakness, he began to seek and find his strength above. There is said to be a peculiar character attendant upon a widow's son ; in such a character the guardian brother shares.

But man is *man*, nevertheless, and cannot at all times live in the same exaltation of spirit. There were moments when Leicester's heart sank under that want of selfish hope which his position seemed to him to forbid.

He had early convinced himself that that which had been left as trust for his sisters, might not (so long, at least, as they remained unmarried or poor) furnish forth the means to make a happy home for his later years. It was but seldom that this fact presented itself with anything of pain to his mind ; for the most part his love went hand-in-hand with his duty to his sisters, and he was content to be theirs alone ; but there were moments when he was less strong ; moments when his heart yearned for the rising up of those hopes which bless most men in their dreams. It was one of these fits of excitement and depression which visited him on the night of which we speak ; a fit so violent and so prolonged that he walked on and on in the stillness of the night before the enemy was conquered. Wherefore on this night ? Who can tell ? Many varied thoughts sweep over the brain,

and some among them, though but light thoughts, have a strange exciting power; many sights pass before the eye, and some, without our knowledge, impress the memory, leaving a trace never to be effaced again. It might have been the sight of a happy home, a father's fond love, or a daughter's devotion; it might have been the sight of a fair face, or the sound of a sweet voice, or the laugh of one who knew no care. It might have been the attraction of one being towards another by inexplicable, magical attraction; who can tell? There is no questioning of the inner springs of thought and feeling. All that man can do is to master such disturbances of the inward man which reason or conscience forbids him to indulge. And so, before he slept, Leicester set himself to master the giant Self, who had suddenly taken possession of his soul.

And now, if it be asked whether his sisters were worthy of his devotion, whether the home they made for him was as happy as his affection had demanded, it must be owned in answer that they were even unusually compassed about with human infirmities ; infirmities very various in their kinds, but all conspiring to mar that peace and sympathy which, had it been more perfect, might have satisfied all his affections.

Marian, the eldest, was at this time twenty-nine, three years younger than her brother. At the period of her father's death, she had been a weak-minded, frivolous girl, with thoughts dwelling exclusively on balls and parties, dress, partners, and love. Her brother endeavoured to impress her mind with the necessity for care and thought in the arrangement of their now limited income, and for this purpose consulted her seriously, not

only on matters of housekeeping, but on the needful sums to be allotted to the different departments of dress, pleasure, and education. He succeeded in interesting her not only beyond his hopes, but beyond his wishes. The love of usefulness, the love of power, the love of management, laid firm hold on her mind; and, with the exclusiveness of weak minds, shut out all other loves. Henceforth, balls, parties, dress, and lovers were abjured; she became a tolerable housekeeper, and a tiresome woman.

Henrietta, the second sister, had a family likeness to Marian's original character. She was also frivolous and sentimental; but with a more varied disposition, and a greater charm of manner, she could never have been what her sister was. Jessie, the fourth, was again a reproduction of the same character, under slightly varying features—more silly than

Marian, and with less charm than Henrietta.

All three were pretty, for there was great beauty in the family ; and none had any very serious faults or evil tempers. But all their minds were small ; they were immersed in small cares, small joys, and still smaller jealousies. Leicester did not find much sympathy of soul with them.

The other two were formed in a different mould. Rachel, the third sister, was like her brother in person, and like him, also, in mind. Her face was beautiful ; her mind, thoughtful and diffident in a degree even beyond his. This diffidence was increased by circumstances. She was lame ; not sufficiently so to cause her much personal inconvenience, but enough to cause awkwardness in her movements, and to make her bashful and retiring from observation. This diffidence prevented that union with her brother and comfort in his society

which might have been hers. All the sisters were jealous of his affection; all would willingly have supposed themselves his first object. Rachel had not the moral courage, even for his sake, to brave the pain these jealousies might cause, and to go forward to give and receive the confidence that might have existed, the sympathy that did exist between them. She was a failure, and she knew it.

Perhaps the one from whom he derived the greatest pleasure and comfort, was his youngest sister, Margaret, now just eighteen. Though she had grown up beneath his fatherly care, she stood less in awe of him than any of her sisters; and though less capable of understanding him, and unable to be so real a friend as Rachel, the freedom and confidence with which she treated him made her society the greatest refreshment he knew. She helped

him in other ways also. Since she had grown to reasonable and observant years, she had stood forth in his defence against the exactions of her elder sisters—exactions thoughtlessly enforced by them, and patiently and kindly submitted to by him, but whose pertinacity tended to reduce him to slavery.

This was the sister of whom he had spoken to Violet as preferring his chaperonage to that of all others. She was a pretty, straightforward, good-humoured girl, who, with no superiority of character, was an example of the comfort such practical qualities as good sense, good temper, and self-reliance can give.

“You were very late last night, John,” observed Marian, as the whole party sat at breakfast on the following morning; “I did not hear your door shut until after three o’clock. What was the cause?”

“Don’t answer unless you please,” said Margaret, who sat by his side.

“I have no objection to answer,” he replied, smiling; “it was a bright moonlight night, and I walked about till I was quite tired.”

“Where did you dine last night?” said Henrietta. “Oh! I remember!—it was Mr. Osborne’s, was it not?”

“Yes—Albert Ellis’s uncle.”

“Has he a fine house?” asked Marian; “what sort of establishment does he keep?”

“Nothing you will care to hear about, my dear Marian; everything very grand. I have brought away no hints for you.”

“But he has a daughter. We should like to hear about her. I know people call her a beauty; is she a beauty? What is she like? Does she dress very fine?”

These and other like questions were asked by Henrietta and Jessie between them.

“She is not like any of *us*,” was the reply. “She has blue eyes and auburn hair. As to her dress, I cannot give you any particulars. It was pretty, I think, but whether fine or not I don’t know.”

“Were there many young people there? Has Miss Osborne a great many people who admire her? Did you like her, John?” continued the two inquirers.

“Don’t answer, John,” said Margaret, lifting up her hand; “I don’t choose that John should be pestered with questions. Let him tell us what he likes, but don’t let us worry him to death.”

“You are needlessly officious, Margaret,” said Marian; “John is able to decide whether he pleases to answer or not, without your help.”

“Not quite; John is too good-natured.”

“But, John, do answer us,” said Jessie.

“Is Miss Osborne a nice girl? is she very fascinating? Did you get on with her, and do you think you could fall in love with her?”

“There is Jessie’s rapid imagination,” he said, smiling, though the ten curious eyes that looked into his face succeeded in bringing a faint, very faint colour there; “Jessie asks that question every time I make a new acquaintance.”

“But you have not answered me to-day,” said Jessie; “in general, he says no—does he not, Henrietta? But to-day he will not say no. Now, John”

“I will not have John pestered,” cried Margaret, peremptorily; “leave him and Miss Osborne alone.”

“My dear Margaret,” he said, with quickness, “they do not pester me in the least. I will answer anything you please, Jessie—what is it you want to know?”

“Whether you think you could fall in love with Miss Osborne,” said both Jessie and Henrietta, eagerly.

“And that is rather a difficult question to answer,” he replied, playfully; “if I say no, that is not very civil to a young lady, is it? and if I say yes, it is not very decorous. But why this extraordinary interest in Miss Osborne? What do you know of her to excite it?”

“As to that, I feel it too,” said Margaret; “I suppose it is because we know Mr. Ellis a little. I like Mr. Ellis, and so I fancy his cousin.”

“Besides, she is a beauty,” said Henrietta; “and though you may think me frivolous to say so, a beauty always interests me more than a common girl.”

“So far from thinking you frivolous, Henrietta,” said Leicester, smiling, “I am of the

same mind myself; but I am afraid we must leave all frivolous things for the present. Marian, you look as if the house books were waiting. Do you want me before I go out?"

She acquiesced, and they went away together. Marian was the only one who ever saw her brother alone. If any other had attempted a private interview, a storm of curiosity and jealousy would have been excited in the house. Of her opportunities, Marian made no use, so far as acquaintance with his tastes and wishes went. Her interviews were solely confined to complaints of servants and tradespeople, taxes, and prices. These things weighed heavily on her mind, and she poured them out into his kind and patient ears on every occasion, heedless how she wearied him, and regardless whether or not he had any worries or troubles to confide in return.

The remaining sisters conversed on what had passed.

“ I think John is going to be in love with Miss Osborne,” said Henrietta ; “ you may not believe me, but before anything was said, when he first came in this morning, I saw something unusual in his face.”

“ So did I,” said Jessie; which fact, however, was doubtful, for Jessie’s thoughts had but seldom an independent being.

“ Then why did you ask so many questions?” said Rachel, speaking for the first time, and then with a rising colour ; “ don’t you wish him to be in love, and to marry ?”

“ To marry !” cried Margaret, startled and aghast ; “ no, indeed, I don’t wish him to marry !”

“ No, indeed !” echoed the two others.
“ Marry ! I never thought of such a thing !
John must not marry !”

"It is the thing I long for," continued Rachel, her colour deepening in the earnestness of her manner; "he has been long enough devoted to us; it is time he had some hope of his own."

"But good gracious!" cried Henrietta, "what would happen to us if he married? Think of the house without a man in it."

"We must all marry too, that is certain," said Margaret; "I could no more live in the house without John than I could live with the fishes in the sea. But, happily, there is no need to think about it. Rachel's thoughts have flown as fast as Jessie's. John has no thoughts of marrying, I am very sure."

"I did not think he had; I only *wish* he had."

"Then pray don't wish, my dear Rachel," said Margaret, earnestly; "it is being so

much more unselfish than I can be, that it makes me quite uncomfortable."

"What did you think, Rachel?" asked Henrietta; for where John was concerned, Rachel's insight into his feelings was instinctively felt; "did you think he was going to be in love with Miss Osborne?"

"He certainly gave us no reason to think so," she replied, "and I don't think John is a person to fall in love in a few hours; but still I did fancy, like you, that I saw some kind of thought in his face this morning. It need not have been that, however. He has many things to think of."

"Oh, no, it was that," cried Jessie, sentimentally; "I saw love in his face when first he came in this morning."

"Don't talk such trash!" said Margaret, indignantly; "one would think John was a

lackadaisical fool to hear you speak. I am sick of the very name of Miss Osborne. Pray let us leave her alone."

CHAPTER V.

“ My soul is full of words—my voice finds none.”

MR. OSBORNE was as good as his word. He learned to like Leicester. He was an individual of a quietly busy turn of mind, especially busy in other people's business ; a good, easy man, with an intellect somewhat dulled by the prosperity of his life ; imposed on by the shows and surface of things, swayed by those who chose to sway him ; but an upright, honourable man, kindly and liberally inclined, and well-judging, too, when he took time to look below the surface.

Though naturally attracted by very different qualities from Leicester's, he deter-

mined to cultivate his acquaintance, because he saw it pleased his daughter ; and having given himself the trouble to go below the surface, he was pleased for himself also. Leicester was invited more than once to dine with them alone, and Mr. Osborne found Leicester at his ease a different man to Leicester in lively society. He had a large mind, making up by acute observation for that lack of variety his circumstances had forbidden him. What he knew, he knew with a lawyer's precision ; what he saw, he saw vividly ; what he heard, he remembered, and reproduced with originality. From the store-house of his mind Mr. Osborne drew forth many a piece of curious information, many an original observation, many an acute opinion ; and there was this charm in Leicester, that he was without consciousness of his power. All that dropped from him, however worth hearing, dropped as

simply as the first quick observations of a child. The steady principle, the lofty integrity which appeared in his tone of thought, were also appreciated at their full value by Mr. Osborne; and in a very short time Leicester became a favourite.

“I like Mr. Leicester as much as you do, Violet,” he observed to his daughter. “He is not showy in society, but he is better than that. I think him a very agreeable and very superior young man.”

“Not so very young,” said Violet, who in her evening’s entertainments being much beset with what she disdainfully denominated *boys*, had a marked preference for age.

“Well, darling, a very agreeable old man ; though to me perhaps his age does not appear as venerable as to you.”

Some of Violet’s acquaintance were in the habit of laughing at her for her manias. She

had manias for things, manias for employments, manias for books, and manias for people. While the fit lasted, the object of the mania reigned sole lord of her mind; when it was over—and sometimes it lasted but a few days—the object was degraded from its throne for a time, or for ever. She could not care for anything that attracted her attention in a properly placid and careless way. Her fancies were whole and entire, never half and half. But there was one thing which those who criticised never observed; and that was, that there was a certain constancy even in the inconstancy of her fancies. “Try all things, hold fast that which is good.” This apostolic rule, with unconscious impulse, not conscious seriousness, was the habit of her mind. The worthless objects lived their day and died; but allowing for the caprices of human nature and an excitable girls’ nature,

the worthier objects outlived the violence of the mania, and became the calm possessors of her time or affections. No thing, or book, or person that had intrinsic worth was ever forsaken ; and no duty, though the zest and novelty had passed away, once imposed, was ever forgotten.

It was with something of this apology that she satisfied her mind regarding her fancies ; nay, justified even their excesses.

“ There is no telling what a thing is worth,” she would say, “ till you have thoroughly examined it ; nor a person, till you have searched them through and through.”

She was, as perhaps is very evident, at this time seized with a mania for Leicester. Now, a mania for a gentleman is not by any means a proper frame of mind for a young lady, but Violet was so unconscious of being actuated by any motive but the purest benevolence

towards Albert's bashful friend, that it is hoped the impropriety will be forgiven her. It is not to be supposed, however, that her mania led her to any indiscretion or unmaidenliness of manner. She was more apt to show her likes and dislikes than is common, and, from the flattery and courting she had received, more fearless in the expression of her opinions, than is usual or perhaps desirable at her age ; but, at the same time, her manners were so entirely her own, and had a grace so sweet and winning in their fearlessness, that even a rigid censor would have found little to condemn.

Her interest in Leicester's character was deepened by a slight circumstance which occurred after their acquaintance had made some progress.

An invitation had been given by Mrs. Osborne to Albert and Leicester, to go with

her and Violet to the play. An early dinner in Park Lane was to precede the play. Violet was extremely fond of all theatrical entertainments, and as unwilling as a child to lose any part of a purposed pleasure. She therefore, in very peremptory terms, enforced upon Albert the duty of punctuality, and assured him that she should sit down to dinner at six o'clock, whether he were ready or not.

Leicester heard the playful command, and determined that Violet should not be disappointed. By the exertion of a strong will he gained his point, and Albert was for once in time. It was five minutes to six when they reached the door of Mr. Osborne's house, and were there informed, to Albert's indignation and dismay, that Mrs. Osborne was not yet come home from her afternoon's drive.

Lavishing upon Violet a considerable quan-

tity of well-merited abuse, Albert led the way to the drawing-room, and planted himself at the window to watch for their return. Leicester stood with him for a few minutes, then, tired of his complaints, sat down, and began to turn over the books on the table.

In a short time Albert saw the barouche approaching, and thinking in his great wisdom that it would be indecorous to "blow up" Violet in Leicester's presence, he slipped out of the room and went to meet her at the door. Leicester was at the moment absorbed in something he read, and did not remark his departure.

After receiving her lecture with a good grace, Violet flew up to make her excuses to Leicester, leaving Albert to bemoan himself to her mother. Her movements were so light and rapid that she stood beside him

before his attention was diverted from his book.

“I am glad to find you so well employed,” she said, laughing as he started. “I was afraid you would be abusing me. But what can you be reading so attentively?” she added, with curiosity.

“Only some verses,” he replied, colouring; and he tossed the book aside with something of vexation.

Now, Violet being afflicted with innate inquisitiveness, felt a sudden and intense desire to know what verses could have so absorbed his attention. Too well-bred, however, to ask further questions, she merely glanced her quick eyes at the book, and let the subject drop.

“I ran up to apologise,” she said. “I know I quite deserve all Albert says, but I must just tell you how it was. We went to

a flower-show, and mamma was very much pleased. Now you know the play is no great pleasure to poor mamma, but she is really fond of flowers, and she seemed so happy looking at them that I had not the heart to drag her away. I know it is wrong to break an engagement, but I hope you will forgive me."

"No, we will not," said Albert, preventing Leicester's answer; "not at least till you have done your best to repair your fault. Go and dress, do. I have sent my aunt upstairs, and you had much better follow her, and let us get to dinner without more delay."

"I will go directly," Violet said, obediently; "and we will be quite ready in a quarter of an hour. I wish you would go and take a walk, then I should not feel that you were waiting. You must have got some card to leave hereabouts."

“ I think I have,” Leicester said. “ Come, Ellis.”

“ When Violet is gone, I will,” he said, obstinately, and she was forced to hurry away.

But her thoughts were with the book of verses, and performing her toilette in an inexpressibly short space of time, she flew again to the drawing-room, and, as she expected, found it empty.

She had observed that a leaf in the book was slightly rumpled, and by seizing it before any other hand touched it, she fancied she could discover what verses Leicester had read. Nor was she mistaken. In the haste of shutting it, a corner was turned down, and the volume opened at once on the following lines :—

“ THE DUMB.

“ There are who when the tide of music wakes,
When the voice of song o’er raptured hearers breaks,
In heart an answering harmony repeat,
Than Orpheus lyre more musically sweet.
But they are dumb.

There are when man with man in mirth rejoices,
When there are ready smiles and eager voices,
Who, could the spirit speak, more glad, more gay,
With golden words would bear all hearts away.

But they are dumb.

And there are souls in whom Love's fires burn
With flame so bright, so pure, that could they learn
Love's magic words, all pain were hushed to sleep,
So would they joy with joy, with sorrow weep.

But they are dumb.

Not mute of lip—in heart more strangely bound,
From love's full fount slow words of comfort sound ;
A veil is o'er the soul, the tongue is tied,
The ardent fire cold icy barriers hide.

And they are dumb.

Oh ! in that land where all the blind shall see,
The deaf, the halt, from their strong chains be free,
Will the glad spirit from its fetters breaking,
And the freed tongue from frost-bound silence waking.

No more be dumb."

The verses absorbed the attention of Violet as much as they seemed to have excited that of Leicester, not because of any qualities in the verses themselves, but because of the insight they gave her into his thoughts.

She imagined (not that it is always a just inference) that the verses which thus absorbed his attention expressed the feelings of his mind; and for the feeling thus exhibited, her kind heart glowed with compassion. She determined—and certainly, in the moment, of so determining, there was no thought of patronizing—to go forward more than she had yet dared to do, for the encouragement of his backwardness, and the consolation of his depression.

As soon as she heard footsteps on the stairs, she jumped up, and pushed the book away, quickly enough to escape Albert's notice, but not so quickly as to conceal from Leicester what she had been doing. By the direction of his eyes she saw her curiosity had been observed, and both coloured as the mutual discovery was made.

He said nothing, but Violet's nature was

too open to allow her to remain silent under the circumstances.

She blushed more deeply, but laughed, and said :

“ I was trying to find the verses you liked, Mr. Leicester. Perhaps you will think me unwarrantably curious, and I am afraid you will think truly. I am curious, I know.” (*“ That you are !”* Albert murmured with delighted emphasis). “ If I see a little butcher’s boy go by with a book, I can hardly help running after him to see what it is. Is it a very bad propensity ?”

“ I suppose it is,” he said, with a smile ; “ at least, we are taught so.”

“ Of course it is !” Albert chimed in. “ The fall of man, and all bad things came from curiosity. Violet would have been a regular Eve !”

“ No,” she replied, decidedly ; “ never

curious in wrong things. Mine is only harmless curiosity—foolish and impertinent, perhaps, but not wrong. At any rate, will you forgive my indulgence of it so far as you are concerned, Mr. Leicester?"

She smiled very brightly and very sweetly as she asked the question.

He only smiled an answer, and Albert broke off the conversation by announcing that his aunt was approaching, and desiring Violet to order dinner.

Mrs. Osborne sat down in the window, and Violet, having obeyed her cousin, joined her. She stood leaning against the wall behind her, and looked very pretty in her airy demi-toilette, with the sunshine streaming upon her bright hair.

Albert, who, in the near prospect of dinner, had recovered his temper, began to compliment her on the rapidity of her toilette, and

from thence proceeded to commend the style of her dress.

“Now that,” he said, “is what I call a proper and becoming dress for a woman. Why they will persist in decking themselves out in their hateful evening dresses I cannot conceive. Why do you do it, Violet? Do you think people admire you ;—do you think men do? I can tell you, you are very much mistaken.”

“One must do as the world does,” she replied, laughing.

“Then there never will be a reform. Sensible women ought to take a line of their own. I say, Aunt Elizabeth,” he continued, raising his voice, “why don’t you make Violet dress herself properly, and set a good example to the world. If she always dressed as she is dressed to-night, she would be liked a thousand times better than she is !”

“Very pretty,” said Mrs. Osborne, with a pleased smile, catching only a very small part of what he said. “That bright blue is my favourite colour. What is your favourite colour, Mr. Leicester?”

“I don’t know,” he said; “violet, I think!”

“There, Violet, there’s a compliment for you,” cried Albert, while Leicester coloured at his inadvertent speech in a way in which it was painful to see any human being colour.

“No, no,” said Violet, quickly; “no compliment to me, for I have nothing to do with my name. It is a gentle and humble colour, and sadly unlike me. Why ever did you give it, to be a constant sermon to me, mamma?” and she stooped and kissed her mother’s brow.

Leicester took up a match from a table near

him, and twisted it in his fingers while the conversation proceeded. When, a few minutes afterwards, a servant entered to say that dinner was ready, it dropped on the floor, and giving it a kick with his foot, he offered his arm to Mrs. Osborne.

“Stay a moment, Albert,” said Violet, “I want to see this,” and she picked from the floor a minute form of a little bird, and exhibited it with something of reverential admiration to her cousin.

“Ah, yes!” Albert said, contemplating it gravely. “But don’t go and remark upon it to him. That’s because he said he liked the colour violet. What a pity it is the man’s so shy!”

“A pity for him, yes,” replied Violet; “but his shyness interests me so much, I cannot wish it away. How I wish I could do anything to make him happier!”

“ You had better leave that alone,” Albert said sagely, as he drew her along ; “ that is not a young lady’s business. Besides, he is too good for patronizing. Leave him alone and he’ll do in time.”

“ I should never think of patronizing,” Violet said, with some sharpness, as they entered the dining-room ; to which assertion Albert only nodded his head.

Among Violet’s schemes for the encouragement of Leicester, and as a means of showing him how much he was appreciated in her father’s house, she formed a resolution to make the acquaintance of his sisters. That she should have formed the resolution, was a proof that Violet was far gone in her desire to give him pleasure ; for she was not fond of young ladies’ society. She had not even an intimate friend. Accustomed to the admiration of mankind, old and young, and satisfied

with her wise monitor Albert for the confidant of her small troubles, she had ever experienced a sense of weariness in the conversation of young ladies. But the mania of the time being was very apt to make slight changes in Violet's ways of thinking, and she now persuaded herself that she should derive as well as give pleasure through the acquaintance she wished to form.

She made her wish known to Leicester one evening when he dined in Park Lane. She worded her request prettily and carefully, concealing her desire to give pleasure, under the pleasure more prominently put forward, which she hoped to receive.

She was surprised, and, to speak truly, very much nettled at only receiving a quiet "thank you," to her request. Violet could not learn to take such disappointments calmly, nor yet to conceal her sensations.

“ I think you do not wish me to know your sisters,” she said, quickly.

“ You are very suspicious,” he said, with a smile.

“ Not suspicious, only quick to see what people mean. I see you do not wish me to know your sisters. Why? Do you think I shall do them harm?”

Leicester hesitated. Violet’s opinion was becoming too important, her approbation too dear to him. He had not been thoroughly conscious of it till that moment, when her request brought vividly before him some scenes at home; some follies and customs of three of his sisters, which would have given him pain for her to witness; which he felt he would rather have died than bring under her keen perceptions. His hesitation was the consequence of struggles which he felt to be disloyal to them.

At last he answered truthfully—

“You must not suppose I do not see the kindness which prompts your request. If I do not accept your offer at once, it is because I hardly think the acquaintance will give you the pleasure you expect. It is no disparagement to my sisters to say that they are very unlike you. Some human beings suit ; some do not. I do not think they would suit you.”

“Do you speak for their sakes or for mine?” Violet asked.

“I believe I spoke for my own,” he replied, honestly ; “I should wish you to like them, and I fear, when you know them, you may not do so. It is better to speak out what one feels.”

“But I think,” she said, playfully, “I am not such a dragon as you make out. I know I do sometimes laugh at girls ; I cannot help

it; but I am not really ill-natured. A little laughing does no harm. But, besides, I am sure I shall like your sisters. It is no kindness; it will be a pleasure to me to know them, unless it would be disagreeable to them."

"Then I will not stand in the way of what I know will give them pleasure—and I must trust to your good-nature," he added, gravely, and after a moment's pause, "to bear as kindly with their infirmities as you have done with those of their brother."

Never before had Leicester alluded to the infirmity under which he suffered; and that he did so now, was shown by his heightened colour to be an effort to him. Violet was so startled and affected by the speech that she blushed very deeply, and for a moment hardly knew how to answer him.

"Compliments ought not to be paid to me,"

at last she said, laughing off her embarrassment ; “ they gratify me too much.”

“ I meant no compliment, I assure you,” he replied, in the same grave tone.

“ Then, at all events,” she continued, hurriedly, “ you give me leave to do what I wish? You disappointed me at first, I own.”

“ I do give my leave,” he said, smiling, “ and thank you for your intention.” And Violet let the subject drop.

The very strange sensation she had felt when Leicester thanked her for her kindness to him, might have given her a warning that benevolence was not the sole and simple motive that actuated her ; but Violet was too happy, her mind too full, and joyous, and active, to be at liberty to analyse its sensations. She pursued her way freely and thoughtlessly, laughingly owning to herself that she had got a new mania, and never con-

sidering that its nature was somewhat different in kind from those that had hitherto occupied her.

CHAPTER VI.

“Somewhat vain she was,
Or seemed so ; yet it was not vanity,
But fondness, and a kind of radiant joy,
Diffused around her.”

The Prelude.

LEICESTER told his sisters of Violet's request, as they sat at breakfast the next morning, and his heart sank at the excitement it produced. It was just such a scene as he dreaded her eyes should see.

“I shall never leave the house till she calls,” said Henrietta ; “I would not miss her for the whole world.”

“No more shall I,” said Jessie, who always repeated Henrietta's words with some addition of her own ; “I shall stand at the window

till she comes, that I may be sure to be in the way."

"It is very good-natured of Miss Osborne," observed Margaret; "for if she feels like me, to walk into a house where five women are watching for her, must be far from a pleasant prospect."

"Yes," said Jessie. "And *I* think she must have some reason for it. *I* think she must be in love with John."

Never before had Leicester had so great a struggle in repressing sharp words to his sisters; but he did repress them, and only said with a smile,

"We all know where Jessie's thoughts fly to."

"I am sure Henrietta thinks the same. Don't you, Henrietta? I know I shall watch her face when I talk about John, and see whether she blushes or not."

Leicester remained silent. He felt too angry to trust himself to speak ; but Margaret answered for him—

“ Then I shall turn you out of the room, Jessie, for your bad manners. I am quite ashamed of you.”

“ Why,” said Jessie complainingly, “ why is Miss Osborne such a very sacred person that I may not look at her if I like.”

“ You may look as much as you please, Jessie,” Leicester now said ; “ I am sure I may trust all my sisters to receive a visitor in a proper way.”

“ Of course,” said Jessie, “ I never meant to do anything I ought not.”

“ At what hour may we expect Miss Osborne ?” Marian now asked drily.

“ My dear Marian,” Leicester said smiling, after another struggle not to be impatient, “ you all speak as if I had announced a visit

from the Queen. Miss Osborne merely asked if she might call some day, perhaps to-day, perhaps not till next week. She said nothing about when the visit was to be."

"I hope it will not be till next week," said Margaret, "because Jessie will be tired of her seat at the window by that time."

"I only asked," said Marian apologetically, "because I should like to have things in order."

"Your own order will do well enough," said Leicester rising. "I should not have mentioned the visit, but that I thought it would be more agreeable to you and to Miss Osborne to know that she was expected. I do not dine at home, Henrietta. At what hour shall you want me?—or have you found a better chaperon?"

"A quarter before eleven, if you please. No; Mrs. Grant cannot go to-night."

"Eleven is quite time enough," said Margaret laughing; "don't hurry for Henrietta, John; remember the last time."

"I remember," he said smiling also; and nodding kindly, he left the room.

"I think John was very near being very angry with you, Jessie," observed Henrietta. "I saw him pinch his lips together when you said that about Miss Osborne blushing."

"And if John had done what he ought," said Margaret, "he would have ordered Jessie to go out of the room. I felt quite ashamed that my sister could make so ill-bred a speech."

"But why?" said Jessie. "I don't see why. I often say those sort of things."

"Then it shows a great want of tact. I am sure I wish John *would* be angry sometimes. I think we are enough to provoke a

saint ; and that John is not provoked, shows that he is greater than any saint that ever was."

"But all I want to know," persisted Jessie, "is this. Why may we not talk about Miss Osborne as well as Miss Howard or Lucy Grant? You never scold me when I say I watch Lucy Grant. I am sure you think something particular about Miss Osborne. Do you think John is in love? Do you, Rachel? I wish you would tell me."

"I don't know," replied Rachel slowly ; "I only feel, as I did from the first, that I would not for the world say anything about her that it would not please him to hear."

"Oh ! he is in love, I know he is in love !" said Jessie sentimentally. "Well, I will try not to look, but I know I shall. I never shall be able to help it."

"Then you shall go out of the room," said

Margaret, decidedly. "You had better take care how you behave."

"I am older than Margaret," said Jessie, presently, to Henrietta alone; "I can't think why she is to scold me as she does."

"Because you let her," was Henrietta's answer.

"Don't you think you shall watch Miss Osborne?" was Jessie's next question.

"Yes; I am sure I shall."

"Then why didn't you say so?"

"Because I am not quite so great a goose as you are;" and so the conversation dropped.

Violet did not call that day, nor the next, but Henrietta and Jessie were as good as their words. Henrietta remained at home, and Jessie rarely left the window. Margaret, although she laughed at them, was as determined to see Violet as they were; and Marian considered the visit to be to herself,

and therefore watched like the rest. The only one who had resolved to be absent was Rachel, and her resolution was upset by a word from her brother. On the evening of the second day, when he came home to dinner, Rachel chanced to be for a moment alone in the drawing-room.

“Has Miss Osborne called?” he inquired; and on receiving Rachel’s negative, involuntarily added, “I hope you will be at home, Rachel.”

And Rachel felt herself bound to be present, and to keep watch with her sisters. It so happened, therefore, that when Mrs. and Miss Osborne called, the five Miss Leicesters received the visit.

Mrs. Osborne had not been thought of, and when she appeared, Marian was satisfied to devote herself to her. Though tiresome, Marian was quiet and inoffensive, and Mrs.

Osborne, whose deafness prevented her from enjoying lively conversation, was well pleased to be questioned regarding the shops she frequented, the rent of houses in London, the most healthful and most expensive situations, and such other matters which were subjects of interest to Marian's mind.

Violet seated herself near Henrietta and Jessie. Her quick eye singled out Rachel at once, as the one like her brother, and the one she should like to know ; but Rachel was too like Leicester not to have so placed herself as to be unapproachable.

"Your brother gave me leave to call. I hope you do not mind?" Violet said at once, with her frank cordiality of manner.

"We thank you very much for your visit," Henrietta replied. "We think it particularly kind," she added, laughing, "because, as my sister Margaret said, it is a formidable thing

to invade the home of five grown-up women."

"Which is Margaret?" inquired Violet; and when Margaret smiled and blushed, continued, "I think you know my cousin, Albert Ellis?"

"I have danced with him two or three times," she answered; "but we very seldom meet."

"You go out a great deal, Miss Osborne?" said Henrietta, half inquiringly, half making a statement.

"Do I?" replied Violet, quickly. "Does your brother say so? Does he think me very dissipated?"

"John would never make such uncivil remarks!" exclaimed both Margaret and Rachel in a breath.

"I suppose it was my conscience that made me afraid," said Violet, laughing. "I know I am rather dissipated, but I cannot bear to

be thought so. And after all, mine is not real dissipation ; for though I am obliged to go to a great many balls and parties, I never stay after one o'clock."

"Oh ! Miss Osborne," said Jessie, "but then, what is the use of going? You have only the crowd, and you cannot dance a bit."

"I do not much care about dancing now. I did for two years, but now I have got tired of it. We go out more because we must now, than because we like it."

"Do you not care for nice partners?" asked Jessie, in her mawkish way.

Violet drew herself up with stateliness, and Rachel blushed, and longed to divert the conversation. Jessie had no tact, and her sisters knew it.

"I suppose we had all rather dance with a nice person than a nasty one," Violet replied

at last; and then, to put an end to what she considered girl's conversation, she moved her chair suddenly towards the table, near which Rachel sat, and took up a drawing that lay upon it.

“This is very pretty—is it your doing?” and she looked across at Rachel, determined to be answered.

“Yes. We have been asked to work for a bazaar, and as I cannot work well, I have done a few drawings.”

“Oh! how good of you, and how you make me ashamed! I am so often asked, and I always think it a bore. I like to give, but I cannot slave. Do tell me about your bazaar—and may I see your things?”

Rachel explained that it was a bazaar for the Consumptive Hospital, which was to take place the following week. She opened the table-drawer, near which she sat; then hastily

closing it, was about to open another, when Violet sprang forward.

“Pray let me see—are not those your brother’s doing?”

Rachel looked annoyed, but reopened the drawer. Violet examined a multitude of little paper birds and beasts, and then said:

“One or two I have seen before. How clever they are! Are these for your bazaar?”

“Oh, no!” Rachel replied, shaking her head, “John does not know we have got these. He makes them when he is anxious or nervous, or has anything to think of, and we pick them up; but he does not like us to show them.”

“How strange!” Violet said, looking at her with curiosity.

“They say all human beings have peculiarities,” Rachel replied; “this is his.”

“You must let me send you some things for your bazaar,” Violet said, changing the subject. “And now, shall you think me very impertinent if I do not wait to be better acquainted before I ask if either of you would like to drive with us? It would give me so much pleasure.”

She looked at Rachel, but Rachel looked away. The others thanked her with all their hearts, and eagerly accepted her offer.

Violet walked across the room, and kissed her mother’s brow, observing,

“I have asked one of the Miss Leicesters to drive with us, mamma. If you do not mind, I think we have plenty of room for two.”

“Do just as you please, dear,” said Mrs. Osborne, cordially; “I shall be very happy to have them.”

Henrietta and Jessie were the two who

usually accepted invitations, and they therefore left the room to put their bonnets on. Violet would have preferred the two others, but she was comparatively indifferent, since all were Leicester's sisters. She was very happy at having so easily accomplished one of her kind purposes.

"The next time we call, you two must come," she said, with frank and earnest warmth. "My cousin Albert told me the other day that you had not always a carriage, and I am sure, with this bazaar coming on, you must have things to do. I will call and see on Saturday, if mamma does not mind, and I am sure she will not."

"Mr. Ellis asked me if we had a carriage," said Margaret, laughing; "he says he cannot understand how women manage without one. He made very particular inquiries."

"That is just like Albert," said Violet,

laughing also ; “ but he is very discreet, and never reveals what he discovers. He would not have told me what he did unless he had thought it necessary for my welfare. When he thinks I am too much spoilt at home, he sometimes brings me to shame by telling me of other people’s wants and wishes. You are not offended with me, I hope, for saying what I did ?”

The entrance of Henrietta and Jessie stopped the conversation ; and Mrs. Osborne, seeing Violet was ready, rose from her seat.

Finding that her young companions preferred a drive in the park to any shopping, she indulged them in their wishes, ending the drive by a visit to a nursery garden, from whence she sent them home laden with flowers.

The following day she went to the Soho Bazaar, and expended several pounds in small

articles for the fancy bazaar the Miss Leicesters had mentioned, and, unable to delay the pleasure she hoped to give, carried her treasures at once to Clarges Street.

Her kindnesses were not always received as they were intended, nor was gratitude always expressed with the warmth she expected ; but there was no disappointment here ; and in the admiration lavished on her provision for the bazaar, she so plainly detected a degree of envy, that she felt she might bestow her gifts on the young ladies themselves to her heart's content. Before a week had passed by, she certainly had lavished both gifts and attentions upon them with superabundant profusion.

Violet had not seen Liecester since her acquaintance with his sisters began, but on the Saturday evening he appeared with Albert. There was a small party at Mrs. Osborne's.

When they entered Violet was engaged in conversation with a young gentleman, whom she classed under the denomination of a boy, and whom she therefore treated with supreme contempt. When Leicester approached she expected the youth to withdraw, but as he by no means considered himself a boy, he pursued his conversation undisturbed. Leicester sat down at a little distance, and Albert stood by Violet.

The young gentleman was making a complaint regarding the impossibility of ever securing Violet for a partner.

“I have asked you to dance four times this week,” he said grumblingly, “and you have always told me you were engaged.”

“Because I was,” Violet replied. “It is your fault, not mine. I have told you that I only stay for two hours, and you time your requests ill.”

"I don't know what time is right, I am sure. I ask at every time. The last time I asked you as you walked upstairs, and you said you were engaged."

"So I was. I had been asked to dance the very moment I set my foot in the house. Why didn't you try again?"

"Because I think you do it on purpose. Now, if I was to ask you to dance the first dance at Lady Vernon's, on Monday, I dare say you will say you are engaged."

"I am afraid I am," Violet said laughing. "It did so happen that I was asked the last thing last night for that very dance."

"Now, Violet, I call that too bad," said Albert. "*I* never would spoil a girl by making so much of her. I think it is a very indiscreet thing to do."

"It does not make me vain," she replied lightly; "I care too little about it to be vain."

Do you think I am made up of pride and vanity?" she asked laughingly, suddenly pushing back her chair, as she met the serious contemplative gaze of Leicester.

"I believe we all have more vanity than we think," he replied with a smile.

"Not you, Leicester," said Albert warmly.

"Do not undertake to answer for me. We know very little of each other or ourselves."

"And so you think me very vain," Violet asked gravely, and with not a little annoyance.

"Indeed," he replied quickly, "I never meant nor had any right to say so. We all are vain, I think, in some form or other; and if you had no vanity in your circumstances, you would be——"—he hesitated, and then calmly added, "something above our common nature."

"I thought you were going to pay a com-

pliment for once, Leicester," observed Albert.

"And Mr. Leicester would have fallen immeasurably in my opinion if he had," said Violet. "I hate compliments."

"Pitiful, mawkish compliments, I dare say; but I know nobody, Violet, who likes a good word better than you do."

"Now let us have done," she said, laughing, but with vexation. "I have been lectured on vanity enough for to-night," and she pushed her chair still further backwards, as a hint to Albert and the young gentleman that she wished to talk to Mr. Leicester.

"I came here to-night to thank you for your kindness to my sisters," he said directly, as if anxious to speak.

"There is no need for thanks when one does but please oneself," she replied quickly. "I told you I should like your sisters, and I do."

“But it is not only the morose givers one thanks,” Leicester persisted. “You have been very kind to them, and they and I thank you ; and now do not think me ungrateful if I add one word of warning.”

“What have you got to say ?” she asked, smiling.

“Do not spoil them,” he said gravely.

Violet coloured with mortification, and inquired,

“How do you mean ?”

“I feared I should offend you,” he said earnestly, “yet I ventured my word. My sisters are but human, and can be spoiled by kindness, as we all can. If,” and he smiled, “you would be discreet, I should really thank you for giving variety to their life, but I do not like things to be overdone, neither for their sakes nor your own.”

“I know exactly what you mean,” she

answered at last. "Albert has been telling you that I take things up and lay them down. But I think you might understand that I should never think of either taking up or laying down in this case."

"I assure you I spoke simply from my own good judgment ; and I think, when you consider, you will see the wisdom of what I say. I am an enemy to all that is excessive. Perhaps I make myself appear a very flat, stale, and unprofitable person, but such is the formation of my mind. And now forgive me."

"No ; for I disapprove of, and condemn your wisdom, and I think you will see that you are mistaken in me," and unwilling to discuss the matter further, Violet began a new subject,

CHAPTER VII.

“No good heart is happy alone.”

BISHOP HALL.

LEICESTER said no more at the time, but he had not spoken without reason. He feared lest his sisters, especially Marian, Henrietta, and Jessie, should too eagerly avail themselves of Violet's good-nature, and his sense of dignity could not bear that they should be patronised. The very feelings with which Violet inspired him, made him the more reluctant to place them in such a position.

Violet, however, interpreted his words as a reproof for her excitable and fickle propensities; and became but the more desirous, by unceasing thought and kindness, to prove to

him that he had been mistaken. Too happy to find recipients for her bounty, whose varied tastes and many wishes permitted its free exercise, she yielded to every kindly impulse that assailed her ; and there was so much forethought, and—to use an ugly but expressive word—delicacy in her attentions, that it seemed to the Miss Leicesters only natural to take what was so naturally tendered.

“ I say, Violet,” said Albert one evening, when he dined alone at his uncle’s, “ I don’t think Leicester is best pleased with you.”

Violet coloured, but asked, lightly :

“ What now ?”

“ I happened to go with him to see his sisters yesterday—I rather like that girl they call Margaret—and while we were there, a box of jewels came in ; a present from you, it appears.”

“ Jewels !” said Violet, angrily ; “ my dear

Albert—little twopenny things, not worth talking about.”

“I don’t know how that may be. I saw a real gold bracelet, not very heavy or precious, I dare say, but such as I should be very thankful to get for twopence. And I tell you I don’t think Leicester was pleased.”

“Then people are very hard to please, and I can’t help it,” she replied, quickly.

“I am not so sure of that. To tell you the truth, Violet, I do think you make yourself rather a fool about those girls.”

“As to those trinkets, Albert, I really could not help giving them. Jessie Leicester stood in mute admiration over some sham things we saw in a shop. They were pretty, but I told her I could not bear to wear sham trinkets; she said her brother felt the same; and though she did not mind, she never dared to do it. In the course of con-

versation, I discovered that they, poor girls, have hardly any trinkets at all. But I was very discreet. This happened a fortnight ago, and I let a whole fortnight pass before I sent my presents. They are really little twopenny things ; but whatever they are, they are true and not sham."

"How very correctly you speak, Violet!" said Albert, dryly ; "real gold for twopence. However, whatever the case may be, I do not speak only of the jewels. It is all very well to be attentive, but things may be overdone."

"What are you and Albert fighting about?" said Mr. Osborne, rousing himself from a doze.

"Can kindnesses be overdone, papa?" said Violet, eagerly, "that is the question."

"It is not a very common fault, dear, as the world goes," he said, sleepily, "and so I

would bear it when it is found." And he dozed again.

"But I say they *can* be overdone, Violet," persisted Albert, "and I am quite sure I am right. Just change places, and ask yourself whether *you* would like the Miss Leicesters to smother you with presents. That is the proper way of considering things. Do as you would be done by."

"I cannot put myself in their place, and therefore I cannot consider it in that light; but I suppose riches are not given us to keep to ourselves? Would you and Mr. Leicester have been better pleased with me if I had bought the trinkets for myself?"

"I believe it to be an absolute impossibility to argue with a woman," observed Albert, rising; "however clever they may be, and I allow you are clever, Violet, they have no more perception of the matter that lies before

them than an infant in arms. You fly off to some abstract question which has nothing to do with our discussion, and which an idiot could answer. Good night, for I am going; only remember that I am right and you are wrong, and so you will find."

"Well, good night," she said smiling, "you have made me uncomfortable, though I cannot see why, and that ought to be triumph enough for you."

"My dear Violet," he said with a kind of parental dignity, "I assure you I want no triumph of that kind. My wish is to see you act properly. I am always sorry when I cannot approve of what you do."

She laughed, and he left her; and Violet, though she could not see why, remained uncomfortable. She was not long left in discomfort; for Leicester, who was always welcomed, and was now a constant visitor at the

house, called late in the afternoon of the following day. With Violet, and even with her father and mother, his shyness had passed away, and with something of a thoughtless thankfulness, he yielded himself to the charm that was enthralling him.

Violet saw in his face that he had something to say ; but she did not intend to stand on the defensive, and therefore talked on common subjects, leaving it to him to attack her if he thought proper.

At a pause he did so.

“Do you remember, Miss Osborne, a remark connected with your kindness to my sisters which I made about three weeks ago?”

“You told me not to spoil them,” she replied demurely. “I am sure I hope I have done no serious harm.”

“I trust not, and yet I am anxious once again to repeat my words.”

“It is no use, Mr. Leicester,” she said wilfully, “if you choose to forbid me the house you can; but if I am allowed to see them, I must take my pleasure.”

He said nothing, but looked dissatisfied.

“I am sure I am very sorry,” she continued, a little hurt by his manner, “that I should give pain or discomfort to anybody; but I really think it is without reason.”

“It does give me pain, I confess,” he replied, “to see this lavish waste and profusion of gifts. I cannot but think of numbers whose bitter sorrows would be alleviated, if half was bestowed on their necessity.”

“Is that all?” said Violet quickly. “Then I do not mind. I thought it was that you were too proud to let *me* give, or *them* receive.”

He smiled, not quite easily, and said,

“I am never sure of what my motives are;

and I may be actuated by low ones. But be that as it may, I am sure it is right to wish that one in your position should learn that there may be extravagance in giving as well as in other things. I speak plainly," he added, colouring; "I scarcely know why I so presume, except that I think I know what some of life's trials are better than you do."

"And if you could know," she said warmly, "how I long to be told of those trials, you would not apologise for speaking. But I must say a word in my defence. We are not, I hope, uncharitable in this house. There is hardly a society in London to which we do not subscribe; and we give soup twice a week, and a good many things besides. But I am afraid I think life would be very dry if we were only kind to the poor."

"There is a medium in all things, though some persons refuse to see it," he replied

smiling. "Perhaps I should not persist in arguing this matter with you, if it were not that I know at this moment of a case of sorrow beyond my powers to relieve, on which a portion of what you have given my sisters would be wisely bestowed, and would be received as a blessing from heaven."

"Oh! Mr. Leicester, and why have you not told me of it before? Do you not know that my life, my hope, my whole pleasure in life, is to do good?"

And all the warmth and kindness of her nature sparkled in her eyes, and animated her face.

"I do know," he replied with earnestness, "and it was for that reason I came to you. I had seen this case of sorrow but a short time before your last gifts to my sisters, and I resolved I would point out to you wiser and better objects for your generosity. Do not

think I or they are ungrateful, for such is far from being the case."

"Do not speak any more about gratitude," she said quickly, "I hate the word; and now tell me what is this case of sorrow?"

"An officer's wife and daughter left utterly destitute. There is the small widow's pension, but the sickness and death of a child have swallowed it up, and much more than that, I fear. At this moment they are without the common necessities of life, and the widow herself is ill. Their destitute state was pointed out to me, and I went to them; but, as I said, their necessity is beyond my powers to relieve, and their case is more suited to a woman's kindness than a man's."

"I will go to them," said Violet. "Mamma," and she went across and kissed her mother, "you will take me to see a poor woman, will you not?"

“Yes, dear, certainly. Where does she live?” and Mrs. Osborne roused herself eagerly.

“It is in a part of London,” Leicester said, smiling, “to which I would not willingly send you. You must be prepared for real misery and its many accompaniments; but I suppose such sights are good for us all. I will write the direction.”

It was to one of the small streets near Soho Square.

“I will go to-morrow,” Violet said, “and I wish to-morrow was come. Could we meet you there, Mr. Leicester, and we might consider what could be done?”

“I will come here, if you will allow me,” he replied. “The mother is too ill, and the daughter too young and pretty to be a fit charge for me. I am thankful to resign them into your hands. I believe you are making

out a romance," he added smiling, as he saw a peculiar look in Violet's face, "but I assure you I am far too prosaic a person for such kind of romances. Do not waste your imagination upon me."

"Is the girl so very pretty?" Violet asked with curiosity.

"Not by any means dangerously beautiful," he said, smiling again, "but certainly pretty, and so fair and young and helpless looking, that I shall be glad to think of her as having a kind adviser and friend. Any assistance I and my sisters can give, you may depend on our giving, but if you will accept the charge I resign it gratefully to you."

"And I take it gratefully," Violet said with warmth; "and I hope I shall acquit myself to your satisfaction."

CHAPTER VIII.

“Grief call it not, ’twas anything but that,
A conflict of sensations without name.”

The Prelude.

It was a new scene to which Violet was introduced on the following day. Not new to most people, nor in itself an uncommon scene of distress, but a new scene to her. The one small room up three pair of dingy stairs ; the close suffocating air which emerged from that room—now the abode of wasting sickness and poverty, and which three weeks before had been the abode of death—the comfortless bed, the emaciated look of the sick woman, and the famine-stricken countenance of the pale

fair girl ;—all these things, no uncommon sight in this world, were new to Violet, and the sight subdued her. There was no word said, nor arrangement made, but as they entered the room a change took place in the common positions of Mrs. Osborne and her daughter. It was Mrs. Osborne who unconsciously went forward to speak, to help, to comfort ; and Violet who as unconsciously drew back, mute, and awe-stricken.

The sick mother seemed to lie in a kind of apathy, and so had lain, her daughter said, since her boy's death, which had taken place in that room about three weeks before. It was only when Mrs. Osborne laid upon the table a small basket of provisions, tea, broth, and arrowroot, that her eye brightened into anything like sense or attention. The daughter, who gave her name as Amy White, very simply and naturally, but tearfully re-

lated their misfortunes, and said, if it had not been for the kindness of one gentleman who had heard of their misery, they should now have been starving. She looked, as Leicester said, too fair and young and helpless to struggle with misfortune ; and though she expressed her readiness to work, yet she seemed at a loss to know how to look for work, or what to do with herself in the wide world of London.

After relieving their present distress, and receiving a thankful acquiescence to a proposal, suggested by Violet, for removing them at once into a healthier lodging, Mrs. Osborne took leave, and Violet, with a few kind words and kinder looks, silently followed her.

“ Oh ! mamma,” she then exclaimed, “ did you know there was such misery in the world ? ”

“ Yes, dear,” said her mother, “ I am afraid I did.”

“ I feel as if I could not breathe,” Violet said and sighed, and she threw herself back in the barouche in profound thought.

When she returned home, and took off her bonnet, she also pulled off all her rings and bracelets, with a feeling of disgust ; then sat down in the window of the drawing-room, to indulge in painful reflections. The sight of the strange inequality in the measure of good things allotted to human beings, cannot but excite reflection in every ardent and thoughtful mind, and the first approach of such reflections is overwhelming. Once Violet rose and exchanged her comfortable chair for a hard one, and several times her eyes wandered over the luxurious and ornamented room with a gaze of amazement and displeasure. She seemed to see at every turn the young

lady's figure (for lady she was by birth and education), in her worn and threadbare suit of black, and with her eyes distended by hunger and sorrow.

"Oh! Mr. Leicester," she exclaimed, when, at the time appointed, Leicester came in, and, after hearing a few words from Mrs. Osborne, approached her, "you have made me miserable."

"I can understand that," he replied with quick sympathy. "I was afraid I should for a time, but not for long—not when you find how much good you can do."

"I do feel so wicked," she said, and tears gathered in her dark blue eyes and made them shine like the stars. "Only tell me, is such misery common? Of course I knew people were poor, but is such horrible misery common?"

"Not very uncommon, I fear."

“Then why do we live as we do? Is it not wicked? This room oppresses me; why, the contents of this room only would save a hundred people from starving.”

“You are entering on a very large question,” he said gravely, “and not a new one. Such thoughts I suppose at times trouble us all.”

“And should they not?” she asked anxiously, looking up in his face.

“I am sure I cannot say they should not,” he replied in the same serious manner; “we do all, I doubt not, spend more on our luxurious tastes than is strictly right; that is a question for every man’s own conscience; but as to the other question—the inequality of men’s lots in this world—that is plainly an ordinance of God. So long as there are any “powers that be,” strength of body, or mind, or talent, or beauty, opposed to weakness, folly,

and deformity, inequality there must be, and the wildest democrat must submit to it. When once we allow this, the question as a general one is answered, but then comes a much more useful one."

"And what is that?" Violet asked.

"I only mean the practical; the lessening the inequality by every means in our power; relieving the distress that comes before us, and if it cannot be done but by cutting off our luxuries, doing it."

"I am glad you say that," Violet said, eagerly; "I am sure I should not mind cutting off luxuries."

"I am sure you would not," he replied, warmly, and then added, smiling, "and now may we come to the matter in hand? I began to speak of it to Mrs. Osborne, but she desired me to come to you."

"Because I usually do settle such things ;

but do you know, Mr. Leicester, it was quite changed to-day. When I went into that room I felt stupefied. I could not think of a word to say, while mamma was so wise and kind it made me ashamed of myself."

"Surely without reason," Leicester said ; "if you did not expect to see such misery, it would have been unnatural not to be surprised by it. As we grow older, we know such things are and will be ; and though we feel them, we are not amazed. But have you thought of any alleviations? I am sure you have."

"Of removing them at once from that dreadful place ; yes, we settled that ; but we want your advice as to *where*. And then after that, I suppose, a small pension—for a time, at any rate. Mamma is sure papa will give it."

Leicester shook his head.

“I am against pensions where they can be avoided,” he said.

“But can they be avoided?” Violet said, anxiously. “That poor girl could never work, and she could not leave her mother to be a governess, even if she was fit for one.”

“I will tell you my plan,” Leicester said. “I went to-day to speak to a clergyman on the subject—a man versed in such cases, and he suggested that she should keep a village school. It would give her a home for her mother, and the work would not be hard. He mentioned to me a village in which such a person at this very moment is wanted, and he wrote to make further inquiries. I was much pleased with the plan.”

“Where is the village?” Violet asked.

“In Dorsetshire. *You* are not satis-

fied," he said, looking at her, and seeing the cloud on her countenance.

"I am only disappointed. She goes, and I have done with her. I had hoped to be a real friend. Her pale face took my fancy, poor girl, and I had thought of a thousand kindnesses I could do her."

"Do not doubt she will want them," Leicester said; "I was only afraid of putting too much upon you. To hold such a situation, she must be respectable, or she would not be respected; and think of all that her house, and her dress, and her mother will require to make them respectable. I fear you will find only too much required of you."

"Nothing can be too much while I have money to give. Oh! how I have wasted my life! Yes, I see—yes, I see!"

she repeated, her eyes brightening, and an arch smile playing on her lips, "for here, at any rate, you will not forbid me to give; here even you will allow that giving is a virtue."

"In moderation," he said, with a smile, "only in moderation."

Activity soon banished the cloud of thoughtfulness that had oppressed Violet's spirits, and with more than her usual fervour she threw herself into the task before her. But her charity had not yet learned wisdom; and it needed the united efforts and entreaties of her mother and Leicester to restrain the exuberance of her benevolence; a benevolence that threatened to turn the head of her victim, and spoil her for ever for the lot in life that was her portion. But Violet, ardent as she was, had a mind open to reason;

and when once the injury she might do was clearly set before her eyes, she laid a strong hand upon herself, and restrained her generosity.

Leicester's plan was a successful one, and after some trouble and correspondence, and many arrangements large and small, Amy White and her mother, still an invalid, but improving in health, were settled comfortably in their new abode. It was an affair which occupied many weeks; there was not only trouble, but there were disappointments. Amy was very helpless, and Mrs. White a grumbler by nature; but Violet's patience never gave way, nor did her ardour flag. Even Albert was obliged to do her justice, and allow that it was not the novelty alone that caught her fancy, and occupied her attention.

On the other hand, it might possibly have been suggested that the feeling which animated her was not pure benevolence. During these weeks the intimacy between her and Leicester made rapid strides. As he was the medium through which all communications to the country clergyman passed, his advice or his knowledge were constantly required; and having laid the burden of Amy's necessities on Violet's shoulders, he could not refuse to give his time and trouble to assist her in her task. With this reflection, he satisfied himself, when conscience suggested that his steps too frequently turned towards her abode, and that his heart beat too rapidly in her presence. It would soon be over—this time of happiness, so he argued; and once over, he would gradually withdraw himself, and

wean himself from a pleasure that might be bought too dear.

No sentiment marked this intercourse. Mrs. Osborne always, and Albert often, partook in it; the one silently, the other criticisingly; but nevertheless its freedom and constancy had dangers, if danger is the proper word to apply to what might have been for the happiness and benefit of both sides.

This danger at last suggested itself to Albert, and remembering that he had been the means of introducing Leicester into the house, he conscientiously pointed it out to Mrs. Osborne.

“I say, Aunt Elizabeth,” he said, one day, “if this goes on, we shall have Violet falling in love with Leicester.”

“Yes, dear,” replied Mrs. Osborne, quietly; “I saw that from the first day he came here.”

“And don’t you mind? Or if you are too unworldly to care about rank and poverty, won’t my uncle mind? Don’t he wish Violet to make a good marriage?”

“I think he will be sorry if it should happen so—a little sorry. Without being worldly, dear Albert, we should perhaps like Violet to marry some person who could make her more of a queen. But you know we told her when she grew up that she was to please herself, and we feel the same now. She is the best judge of what will make her happy; and if she is happy, we are happy too.”

“You are quite a philosopher,” Albert said, smiling; “well, I know what I think. She will be a happy woman if she gets Leicester for a husband, but I don’t quite see how it is to be managed.

Leicester could never propose, that is certain; he would die in the attempt, or even at the mere thought of it. He must have a hint if such a thing is to be."

"No, dear," Mrs. Osborne said, laying her hand on his arm; "*never* give hints about such things. I like to think that marriages are made in Heaven, and I would leave them to be made there. It may, after all, be a mere fancy on Violet's part. Remember how excitable she is, and how soon she changes. If they really love each other, Mr. Leicester will find it out in time; and when he has found it out, he will not fear to speak. For the present, it is best to let it alone."

CHAPTER IX.

“ Love that makes
The day pass lightly on, when foresight sleeps,
And wisdom and the pledges interchanged
With our own inner beings are forgot.”

The Prelude.

“ I AM so glad, Rachel, to have found you alone,” said Margaret one day, softly opening the door of her sister’s room ;
“ I do so want to speak to you.”

It was many weeks after the date of the last chapter. The London season was over, and a broiling August sun was driving every inhabitant of London who could leave it to seek for cooler shades. Every alternate year Leicester took his

sisters for a month or two to the sea-side; but in those days to move a large family, who liked when they did move to have all their comforts undisturbed, was a costly affair; and the alternate trips of pleasure in peace and comfort had been preferred to yearly visits paid in less luxuriant style. The Leicesters were therefore still in London; and, with the exception of Rachel and Margaret, they were content to be there.

“What is it, Margaret?” Rachel said, looking up from a book she was reading.

Margaret closed the door as softly as she had opened it, and began to speak in an under-tone.

“It is about John, Rachel. What do you think? Here is London quite over, and Miss Osborne gone, and nothing has

come of that friendship we thought so much about. And how grave John looks; does he not?"

"He does *look* grave," Rachel said, "but he is as cheerful as usual."

"Yes—for us. He thinks that his duty; but I watched him as he walked down the street this morning, and I felt I could not bear to see him look so grave any more. I wish you would ask him what is the matter, Rachel?"

"I cannot. He might not like it."

"But if he did not, what then? Why do we stand in such terrible awe of each other? He never is angry; but if he was, what would that matter?"

"It is not that exactly," Rachel said, musingly, "but I cannot bear that he should think we watch his proceedings, and gossip about his concerns."

“Is it gossiping to take an interest?” Margaret asked. “Jessie does gossip about him I know, but I cannot call it gossiping to feel sorry to see him unhappy, and to long to know what is the cause.”

“I am sure I don’t think it is, my dear Margaret; I feel the wish to know quite as much as you do! All I mean is, that when a man has five sisters, they should be very careful in their questions and remarks. I think they should try in every way to show him that they do *not* watch. That is always what I feel, at least, and it makes me afraid of questioning.”

“I have a great mind, then, to do it myself,” Margaret said. “I must say it seems very unnatural to see one’s brother look grave and worried, and never to ask him why.”

“What should you say?” asked Rachel, with curiosity.

“I should begin by telling him that I beg he will never think of such a thing as marrying without our consent, and that my consent I *never* will give.”

“But, my dear Margaret!” said Rachel, with a look of dismay.

“Oh! that will be only to begin, and to see how he takes it. If I was to do it sentimentally, I should be frightened; but if I begin by being cross, we may get into conversation; and if once he will let me talk to him, I will give him some good advice.”

“Then do. You will do it much better than I should. Are you not going with him to Windsor to-morrow?”

The voices had a little forgotten their under-tone during the last part of the

conversation ; and Jessie, who, by some natural magic, always discovered when any confidential conversation was going on, looked into the room, and seeing two sisters together, immediately joined them.

“ Why do you come to talk up here ? ” she began. “ It is so dull downstairs. It is rather hard if there is anything to hear that I may not hear it.”

“ Come and hear it, by all means,” said Margaret, pushing a chair towards her. “ Now, what do you want to know ? ”

“ That is always the way you answer ; but it does not deceive me. I know you were talking about some particular thing, and I think it was about John, and I do so want to know. Do you think he is in love ? do you think Miss Osborne likes him ? do you think she has

refused him? do you suppose they write to each other? do”

“My dear Jessie, do hold your tongue,” Margaret said, quickly. “If you wish to ask all these questions, you had better ask John.”

“And so I would, only that if I do, you abuse me, and say I have no tact.”

“Well, that is true,” Margaret replied, laughing; “but don’t ask *us*, for we cannot give you any information.”

“I am sure Rachel knows,” Jessie said, fretfully; “and as I am older than Margaret, I think it is very hard, Rachel, that you have Margaret up here in your room; you never have me, and nobody ever tells me anything.”

“I am coming down now, if you will carry my drawing-book,” Rachel said quietly, and rose from her seat.

“I am glad of that,” Jessie said, quite satisfied at having disturbed the conversation; “I cannot think why you should come up here to talk; it is so dull downstairs. At this time of the year too, when we must be left to our own company.”

Margaret went with her brother to Windsor on the following day, but it was not till they got near home on their return that she summoned courage to make her attack. She then began as she had said she would.

“I am not thinking of marrying,” he replied with a slight smile; “I will remember what you say, but I do not need it.”

“But, my dear John, I hope you do not think I meant what I said,” Margaret exclaimed eagerly. “I do give my

consent; and much more, I am longing to hear of your marriage. Don't tell me that you have no thoughts of it."

She looked anxiously in his face, but the same grave slight smile was all his answer.

"I am serious now," she continued, "do speak to me."

He did not reply, and she went on—

"Why did you not go to Broadstairs last Saturday? I heard Mr. Ellis ask you, beg you to go, and I saw, at least I think I saw, that you wished it. Why did you refuse?"

"You seem determined to know all my thoughts, Margaret," he said so gently and kindly that she wondered why she had been afraid, "and so I suppose I must tell you. I have behaved as only a young man ought to behave; indulging

myself, and consciously, too, in thoughts that I knew too well could not last. But I mean to do so no more."

"But why, John? I cannot understand why. I think Miss Osborne likes you; I am sure you must think so too."

"Yes, Margaret, I think she *likes* me. She is clear and open as the day, and what she feels she shows. She likes me; and I should be, nay, I am grateful that she does. It should be, it is a pleasure to me; but it is not enough for me"—he paused, then added, and again broke off—"for *me* to dare"

"There is no *daring*, John, in a man like you."

He shook his head.

"I think you are wrong," Margaret

said boldly ; “ I think sometimes to be over-humble is very like pride.”

She was sorry for her boldness when she saw the deep flush that overspread his face. She felt she had touched some too sensitive chord.

“ You may be right,” he replied at last, “ but man is as he is made ; and we see things, perhaps, with different eyes. *I* can but feel my unworthiness and presumption. I dare not hope, and to be refused I could hardly survive. And now, let us have done. You mean, dear Margaret, very kindly, and I thank you ; but you give me pain.”

And as she saw he spoke the truth, she was forced to submit.

Feeling it due to Rachel, she told her what had passed, expressing, at the same time, in stronger terms, her astonishment

at, and disapprobation of, his diffidence."

"I can understand it," Rachel said ;
"I should feel just as he does."

"But not being what John is," Margaret persisted ; "he has not worldly good things, but he has much better things."

"Yes, Margaret, *we* know he has, and so, perhaps, does Miss Osborne, but he does not. He knows what he has *not*; but such a mind and such qualities as he *has* are just those of which the possessor himself is unconscious. He cannot presume on those."

"Presume," Margaret repeated, pondering over the word. "No, I don't want him to presume, but I do like a man to venture. Men have a great superiority over women in being allowed the power of choice, and they ought to be generous, and make ventures, even if in

the dark. Women can only refuse; they ought not to be grudged that very disagreeable and uncomfortable privilege."

"But if it is so disagreeable, Margaret, men ought not to force it rashly upon them. Think what it would be to Miss Osborne to refuse a man like John."

"But I don't think she would refuse."

"Ah! that is another question. All I mean is, that I do not wonder at his diffidence. I sometimes think Miss Osborne is in love with him; but she is so kind and frank, and warm-hearted, that more often I wonder if it has ever crossed her mind. And as *I* feel that, it is not strange that he should feel it also."

"Well," said Margaret, totally unconvinced by anything her sister said, "I must say I like a man to venture, and I think it a great pity to indulge in over-

diffidence. Now, I suppose we must see John's grave face all this long autumn."

In this latter supposition she was mistaken. Roused by her questions to a perception of his gravity, and reproaching himself for having excited anxiety, Leicester exerted himself tenfold for the amusement of his sisters; and whatever the effort might have been to him, the long autumn had never passed so rapidly.

The invitation to Broadstairs was repeated more than once, but was always refused. He planned Saturday and Sunday excursions with his sisters in succession, that he might refuse without any appearance of backwardness. When Violet returned to London, he intended to resume his visits under certain restrictions; the interval he was employing in bracing his mind and vanquishing himself.

Mr. Osborne had no country place, and as the sea-air was necessary to Mrs. Osborne's health after the heat of London, and as Violet particularly enjoyed the winters in London, he had never established himself at any villa. Her autumn visits to the sea-side were usually very agreeable to Violet. Her powers of enjoyment were quick and keen; her resources in her own self endless; and her kindness being always called out by some invalid child, or girl, or old woman, to whom she devoted herself for the time being, life slipped from under her hands with the quickness of perfect content. But the days of perfect content had vanished, perhaps for ever. The intoxication of early youth, that second but more romantic, more imaginative, more spirited childhood, rarely lasts above two

years; and when that is gone, whatever of radiant joy, or calmer happiness may be in store, life has no third cup of single, simple, unqualified content to present. Henceforward, though differently mixed in different lots, something of care, doubt, or anxiety is blended with the draught of hope; henceforward, single, simple content is looked down upon as marking inferiority in the scale of existence, and with something of a sigh of contempt the days in which it was sufficient for happiness are recalled.

Violet was possessed of all her usual elements of satisfaction; her invalid *protégés* were more than commonly interesting, her schemes of kindness and charity were wiser and larger. Acquaintance more than usually agreeable were to be met with if society was desired;

the autumn was finer; the plans for her amusement more unceasing; but she was restless. Leicester had read her very truly; she had never yet allowed to herself that she did more than *like* him—had been far too happy as she was to think of so dry a thing as marriage, far too full of her attentions to him, her desires to win and relieve him from his miserable backwardness, to know how necessary he was becoming to herself. But now that she saw him no more, she was restless and dissatisfied. Her nature was too bright and elastic, her hopes for future pleasures too strong to allow her to pine or brood in melancholy thought; her confidence in herself perhaps too strong to give her any real uneasiness of mind; but still the surface of life presented no longer an unruffled mirror; the present

was no longer so blissful a reality that a future was an intrusive thought.

“How very nice this is,” Albert said, as he stood with her one evening by the sea. It was in the beginning of October, but the weather was still mild and pleasant, and a lovely sunset had kept them lingering on the beach.

“Very,” Violet said, warmly, “and I must stay and see what colours the clouds will take next. It is like the sunset in ‘Childe Harold.’ Let us sit down and watch the sky.”

“You look at these things poetically,” he said; “I like them because they are beautiful, without thinking about poetry, or theorizing about colours. What a sin and a shame it is to have to live always in London—to see these things as a sight, and not as one’s natural born inheritance.

But I don't mean to go on so all my life ; that I can tell you."

"Not when you have married the heiress you used to speak of. What a pity it is, Albert," she said, laughing, "that you never have taken to me ! With your opportunities, there is no telling what you might not have done."

"You would not have suited me at all," he said, placidly ; "I have no idea of marrying a woman who thinks herself my superior."

"No ; neither for husband nor wife would that be an agreeable prospect. I like superiority, of course, and wish for it in my husband, but still"

"Oh, Violet," Albert said, sarcastically, "we know very well what you intend to have ; the most superior man on the face

of the earth, but perfectly submissive to you for all that."

"I believe so," she said, laughing; "superior in principles, and superior in intellect, but inferior in some things by way of consolation. The fact is, I was not born submissive, and we must be as we are born."

"This is delicious!" Albert said, inhaling the sea-breeze, and looking at the glorious sky; "talking of colours, there is every colour of the rainbow there—green, purple, rose-colour It is a sin to go to London. When do you move, Violet?"

"In a fortnight," she replied, eagerly; "and I am so glad!"

"Glad! are you? why?" and he looked intently in her face.

She blushed, and he then discreetly looked away, but Violet was not sentimental; and, conscious of her blush, she said, boldly,

“I miss Mr. Leicester’s visits; that is one reason. I want to know why he would not come and see us.”

“You had better not ask him,” Albert observed, with his usual discretion.

“I certainly shall. Why should I not?”

“Because such questions are not proper for girls. He may have reasons he does not choose to tell.”

“And he can say so, can he not?”

“Yes; but then you will fancy there is a mystery. Men do not like to be questioned, and I advise you to hold your tongue.”

“I would take your advice if I could,”

Violet said, "but I know I cannot. I have thought him uncivil—perhaps, to say the truth, a little ungrateful; and yet I am sorry to think so. I must satisfy myself."

"Ungrateful! what a word for such a man as Leicester! Why, what have you done for him so deserving of gratitude?"

"You cannot make me ashamed of the word. I have done all I could to please him; and though no more than he deserves, a man, however superior, should be grateful for that. I did not expect he would so soon forget us all; I did hope he would miss us too much to refuse the little trouble of coming here to see us. But it is as the ballad says," she added, laughing,

“ ‘Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on sea, and one on land,
To one thing constant never.’ ”

“He may have good reasons, Violet,”
Albert said, gravely.

“And that is what I wish to know,”
she replied; and then the conversation
broke off.

But when Leicester and Violet met,
she found the question less easy to ask
than she had anticipated.

He called with Albert a few evenings
after Mr. Osborne's return to London; but
the consciousness that he had acted with
forethought, and not as he would natu-
rally have acted, made him constrained.
Violet's manner added to this constraint.
She had determined to show no pique;
but against her will it did appear. A
slight coldness, or rather a slight repres-

sion of her usual cordial warmth, was certainly to be discovered, and (though such a coldness might have reassured Leicester, could he have argued on the subject) it froze him.

Their conversation was calm, quiet, and indifferent. Leicester had determined that that visit should begin a new phase of friendship, and with unspeakable pain he felt it had begun.

But it did not quite end here. When Albert joined them, he casually alluded to the charms of Broadstairs; and, moved by a sudden impulse, Violet seized the opportunity to ask the question Albert had forbidden.

“Why would you never come near us, Mr. Leicester?” she said, with a return to her own natural manner; “we had a nice house, and most enchanting sea-

breezes. I think it would have done you good."

Leicester had provided himself with an answer to this inquiry. He had made arrangements, the simplest and most natural, that he might have a proper excuse; but somehow they escaped his memory at the moment, and colouring, he only said:

"I was extremely obliged to you all for the kindness of your invitations. I hope Albert thanked you as I desired him."

"Oh! yes, he thanked," she replied, with a little scorn; "but thanks were not quite all we wished or expected. We were offended, were we not, Albert?"

"Speak for yourself, Violet," he replied drily. "*I* can understand reason when I hear it;" and, unwilling to see Leicester

embarrassed, he strolled back to his aunt.

“Then I speak for myself,” Violet said gravely.

“There was at any rate no cause for *offence*,” Leicester answered, in a low tone; and the tone more than the words made Violet’s heart beat quick.

For an instant she felt embarrassed, and wished her question unasked; but the next instant she recovered herself.

“I don’t know what is generally considered a just cause for offence,” she said, with a voice and manner of grave dignity; “but in my opinion there is no greater cause than when those who have acted like friends cease to act so. It must come either from a change in themselves, or else from distrust of the

words and actions of others; and unless when it is a case beyond offence, I think either of these causes may be allowed to produce it."

"We cannot rightly judge of the motives of others," Leicester replied, with a manner as grave as her own; "and therefore we should not be hasty in taking offence."

No more was said either by way of comment or explanation; but Violet felt, as well as Leicester, that a new phase in their friendship had indeed begun.

CHAPTER X.

“ I had stood
In my own mind remote from social life,
Like a lone shepherd on a promontory,
Who, lacking occupation, looks far forth
Into the boundless sea.”

The Prelude.

FROM that time, for many weeks, Leicester lived in a perpetual ferment and torment of heart. Often, after leaving the house in Park Lane, he walked up and down, as he had done on the first night of his acquaintance with Violet, heated and feverish, even in the cold November fog. He no longer dreaded a repulse (he had indeed a natural diffidence on that subject; moments when he doubted whether

the question *marriage* had ever entered Violet's imagination), but this was no longer *the* fear that agitated him. He thought Violet liked, perhaps, in the broad acceptance of the term, loved him; but he feared she did not love him *enough*; not with the supreme and exclusive devotion which could alone carry them happily through the trials and disappointments of their united lives. For Leicester, though he loved Violet with an ardour youth cannot know, had not youth's romantic imagination to gild the future. Older in mind than in years, he saw, with a far-seeing glance, that there must inevitably on both sides be much to bear. Ten years before he would have looked sanguinely forward to the change in himself which a union with one as bright and sunny as Violet must

bring ; but he had no sanguine anticipations now. Such as he had been for two and thirty years, such he would be to the end. Nay, he dreaded lest in that very union—lest in the widely different disposition of his wife—lest in the dependency their different worldly positions must cause—the chain that bound him might not press all the more heavily on his soul. He saw his future trials and shrank before them ; and still more painfully he foresaw those of Violet. He knew that the world's opinion was not indifferent to her. He could see that praise was sweet, and admiration precious ; he could guess that she would desire to be proud of the man she loved and had chosen ; and to this desire blank disappointment must ensue. He had gifts, and he knew it ;

but he could not bring them beneath the world's gaze; not even with Violet's love before him—not even in the desire to be all she desired could he, even in imagination, picture himself another man than he was. *She* would go forward winning all hearts, and she would look back and see *him* plodding along the path of life, neglected, uncourted, unbeloved.

There were moments when *for her sake* he could willingly have blotted out for ever that day whose annals recorded their first meeting; there were hours of doubt and questioning whether even yet it were not happier for both that the incipient passion should be smothered, and never see light.

But day by day words fell from Violet which made it impossible that he

should attempt to misunderstand her or recede.

“What is that letter, darling, and why do you keep looking at me?” said Mr. Osborne one evening, while Leicester and Violet were talking. “What plot are you and Mr. Leicester forming upon my good-nature?”

He joined his daughter as he spoke.

“It is a request, papa,” said Violet; “and I am afraid I must come to you about it, it is beyond me.”

“What extravagances are you leading her into now, Mr. Leicester?” Mr. Osborne inquired smiling. “Let us hear what it is.”

“It is not a request,” said Leicester rising, “but a suggestion from the clergyman of the parish where Miss White is now living. I knew Miss Osborne would

be angry if I did not lay the suggestion before her, but I quite agree with you that we are extravagant, and apt to forget that Miss White is not the only distressed person in this world."

"Now, Mr. Leicester," Violet said, shaking her head at him, "you know you think this a reasonable request, and you must not turn against me. Listen, papa. I know you will think it reasonable too."

She took up the letter and read a few sentences describing Amy White's comfort and her gratitude. She then went on ;

"I have one suggestion to make, and that is, that should there be at any time sufficient funds something should be done towards providing a small kitchen range, or otherwise increasing the comfort of the

kitchen. It is at present very poorly furnished, and Mrs. White being an invalid, and accustomed to better fare, finds it hard to be satisfied with the poor provision that must be hers. Her daughter does all she can, but the grate is small and smoky, and there is no oven, nor any means of making a variety in their daily food."

"There, papa, you can fancy what a trial that must be to an invalid. I dare say underdone beef-steaks and smoky mutton chops, and that kind of thing."

Leicester smiled at this picture of Mrs. White's bill-of-fare, but said nothing. Mr. Osborne, who, though no gourmand, was too much accustomed to fare well not to value his good fare, entered into the subject with interest.

After a little talk with Leicester, and

an inquiry into the price of a kitchen-range, he retired to write, and presently returned with a cheque, which he put into Violet's hand, saying smilingly,

“Now, nothing more, Violet, for a long, long time; I forbid the mention of Miss White's name for a whole week.”

“That is a kind father,” Violet said as he left them. “There, Mr. Leicester, you must write to the clergyman, and as I am sure there is more than is wanted now, you must tell him to lay by a little for the next great want. You see, I am learning prudence.”

Leicester gravely took the cheque, and, as he did so, remarked,

“It is certainly a blessing to be rich.”

“Yes,” Violet said warmly, “it is; but only in this view—only to give.”

Leicester was silent, and she went on :

“I am sure I am not going to say anything against riches in themselves ; I dare say I like comfort and luxury too much, and all the things that riches give, but, though I like them, that is not the cause of my calling riches a blessing, that is not why I thank God in my prayers for having them. I would not be poor—I bless my fate that I was not made poor—but only on this account, because I should then lose the happiness of giving.”

Her face was beaming and bright with the earnestness of what she said.

“I quite believe you,” Leicester said with warmth, but there was a shadow all the while on his countenance.

“I wonder if you feel as I do, Mr.

Leicester," Violet began again after a moment, as if she was seizing an opportunity to pour out the thoughts of her heart. "It seems to me that preachers in general preach so poorly on this subject. They speak to us, to all rich people, as if we were sordid souls, as if we cared for riches for our own sakes, and thought of nothing but spending on our own grandeur. I sometimes long to get up and tell them that they do not understand human nature."

"You must remember," Leicester said, "that preachers deal with masses of men. I mean no compliment when I say that congregations are not all composed of Miss Osbornes."

"Do not say of Miss Osbornes. You know that you feel as I do."

"I have not been tried with great

riches," he said seriously ; " I see they have a tendency to make men selfish. Why should I suppose myself to be better or wiser than others ?"

Violet was silent for a few minutes, and when she spoke it was with some change of subject.

" I almost hate myself for speaking so much of riches," she said ; " for what are they, and what distinction do they give ? If I say what I truly think, it is that there must be something poor and low in the mind which sets up riches as a mark of distinction, which looks on riches as an object for homage. I should scorn myself if I thought—I scorn all who think—that riches are an unapproachable thing."

And again her face glowed with the earnestness of her thoughts.

“Perhaps I agree with you,” Leicester replied, “more than you would imagine. Society gives a certain estimation to riches, and to the common laws of society we must submit; but I myself am no worshipper of wealth.” He paused, then added, while a glow stole over his cheeks: “The gifts of the mind and heart, and in their degree of the body too, are those which command my homage, and they only I look upon as unapproachable things.”

To such a speech no reply could be given, and it was only after an embarrassed silence that Violet endeavoured to laugh, and lightly said—

“I am glad, then, that we are of one mind. You know what my thoughts on riches are, and I know yours. And you must not forget,” she more gravely added, “that we are agreed.”

She would have given worlds to speak more plainly, but she dared not. But there was no need of plainer words. Leicester read every thought of her heart, saw that she was ready to give herself and her wealth into his hands, and yet doubted still if the true love was there, which was the only wealth he desired to receive; that true love which, in giving perfect sympathy, might loose him from the chain that bound him, and the burden which weighed him down.

It was about a week after this time that Leicester called in Park Lane; it was at an hour in which he had sometimes found Mrs. Osborne alone; and so, according to his hope, he found her on this occasion. Shy men are very apt to make more awkward a thing which needs the yielding to impulse not to be done

awkwardly ; but it was not on account of any shyness that Leicester came to Mrs. Osborne's. The constant and pressing invitations to their house, were sanctions from Violet's father and mother to his attachment ; but he thought that Violet's position in the matter of worldly goods needed a double sanction, and what he did he would do openly.

“I am come to ask you,” he began at once, “to permit me to see Miss Osborne alone. You may guess on what errand I come ; and you may guess also, in part at least, what I feel in thus daring to come. I know you must think me unworthy, but you cannot think so more than I do myself.”

His voice was too low and hurried for Mrs. Osborne to hear. Only the word

“unworthy” reached her ears; but she saw by his face what he said.

“No one whom Violet loves, or who loves Violet,” she replied, in her soft, gentle way, “can be unworthy of her. I wish you success.”

“Do you, Mrs. Osborne, wish me success?” he asked, eagerly.

She heard him this time, and answered with earnest kindness—

“You know well how precious a gift we think our child; we should not lightly give her away, but we have seen enough of you, Mr. Leicester, to be sure that we may safely trust her and her happiness in your hands; if you can win her love, you have our love and blessing also.”

“Her happiness!” he said, grasping the hand Mrs. Osborne held out to him,

while a shadow fell on his countenance. "You make me afraid. Her happiness! it is an awful trust. What am I that I can make her happy?"

Mrs. Osborne smiled gently, and, rising, said she would call her daughter. Her manner was most encouraging, but she left Leicester in a tumult of troubled thoughts. Violet's happiness to be placed in *his* hands! in his, who found his own being a burden too hard to bear! It seemed to him as if never yet had he faced this thought as it needed to be faced.

He was standing leaning within the window in which Violet often sat, when the door opened and she entered. It was a winter's afternoon; but all the Osbornes loved light and brightness, and the lamp and candles were blazing, and Violet was in full light as soon as she

appeared. Leicester's eyes fell eagerly upon her, and for the first time a flash of hope illumined his heart, in the thought that possibly she did love him even as he desired and required to be loved. For the first time it was not the bright Violet who shone like a star above him, but a something soft and tender, who might submit to lose her being in his own.

It was the sight of her as timidly, shyly, with varying colour and drooping eyelashes, she came slowly towards him, that put these happier thoughts into his head. The burden of his being and the awful weight of her happiness floated from before him, and almost before he knew that he had met her, the deed was done, the words were spoken, and Violet was his own betrothed wife.

It was not till then that the thought of himself recurred. For a few moments he was caught up into a paradise, leaving behind him the chains of his infirmities; and it was not till Violet placed her hand in his, irrevocably his own, that the sense of his unworthiness, the weight of the trust reposed in him, returned again.

He no sooner felt them than they were poured out before her. Sadly and touchingly he spoke of the weakness that made his life burdensome to him, reproaching himself for having dared to love her, and for now trying to unite her bright being to his; and softly, and like an angel, Violet listened to him, and comforted him; and in her sympathy the rising trouble died away, and life spread out new and fair and free before him.

The happiness of such moments is often spoken of as an illusion; but the word is falsely used. It is an illusion that they will last; but while they last, their happiness has no falsehood about it. It consists in the annihilation of *self*, and the freedom from that bondage is a joy so real, that perhaps nothing on earth is liker to heaven. In such moments the most selfish are transformed, and the good and unselfish, dropping from them their mortal faults and infirmities, become very angels of light. Nothing for the moment can be more real; but then they are only moments. The chain of mortality too soon clogs again.

“You must come to papa,” Violet said at last, rousing herself and him from their first happy trance. “I know what mamma thinks, because she kissed me so

kindly when I came down; and I am sure of papa, too, but I shall like him to know at once how” she paused, and blushed, then added, smiling, “how happy I am!”

Leicester sprang up, fresh and strong in the confidence of Violet’s love, and followed her.

“Wait a moment, and I will call you,” she said, and hastened down the stairs.

She had heard the house door close a few minutes before, with her father’s peculiar and somewhat noisy touch, and she now opened the door of his study, and called to him;

“May I come in, papa?”

She had just time to see that he was sitting with his head leaning on his hands in an attitude of fatigue, care, or thought unusual to him. She saw it with a

momentary surprise, but had not time to acknowledge the surprise even to herself, before the attitude had changed, and he came forward to meet her, as he said—

“Yes, darling; what is it?”

“Oh, papa!” she said, putting her arms round his neck and kissing him; “I am so happy! I only hope you will be so too. Mr. Leicester”

She said no more. Mr. Osborne kissed her, but there was something of a sigh, and there was a shadow on his face. Certainly this end to Leicester’s friendship with his daughter was not unexpected; yet his air was startled, puzzled, anything but pleased.

“Will you see him, papa? he is waiting to see you,” she continued, eagerly; “and, dear papa, you must be very kind to him; you must be as glad to have

him, and gladder, than if he was a prince."

Her father kissed her again, and in his many kisses concealed some feeling that was not to appear.

"Call him, darling," he said; "you may be sure whoever makes you happy is more than a prince to me."

But he sighed again, and pressed his hand on his brows in some embarrassed thought, when she flitted away.

Leicester entered alone, and in a straightforward, manly way—never shy or nervous when any actual business or duty lay before him—approached Mr. Osborne, and told wherefore he came; and Mr. Osborne, mindful of Violet's words, met him with all the warmth and cordiality of which he was capable.

"I do not speak to you of my

unworthiness and presumption," Leicester said, after a moment, with quiet dignity; "not because I do not feel that I am unworthy of her, for God knows I do feel it from my heart; but because in my eyes, and I hope in yours, her choice is enough. *That* makes me worthy."

"You say true, Mr. Leicester," Mr. Osborne replied; "and, believe me, I feel too strongly your own intrinsic worth and goodness, not to be happy in trusting my darling in your hands;" he shook Leicester's hand with an agitated pressure as he spoke. "I could have wished" he paused and hesitated, and put his hand on his brows again; then rousing himself, said quickly: "Forgive me, Mr. Leicester, if I do not say more on this subject at the present moment. I have been harassed to-day, and my head aches.

You will, of course, wish to tell your sisters what has passed, but be so good as to beg them not to announce it until I have spoken to you again."

"You may depend upon it," Leicester said quickly, "not a word shall be said."

"Thank you. Good night. We shall give you a precious thing, Mr. Leicester; you must cherish my darling as *we* have cherished her," and tears fell down his cheeks.

It was again that awful trust of Violet's happiness, and again Leicester trembled.

"If love can do it," he said with passionate fervour, "there is no fear."

"I know it; we trust you;" and again shaking his hand, Mr. Osborne retired into the room, and Leicester left him.

After another interview with both Violet and her mother, Leicester walked home. The excitement of the last weeks was passed; he was at rest; doubt and fear had passed into joy and certainty; he had gained a treasure whose value and beauty even a lover's eyes could scarcely rate too highly; he had been met with a warmth, a tenderness of care and love which should have hushed every throbbing pulse into calm and quiet; and yet there was a weight upon his heart as he walked along—a strange, undefinable oppression. This treasure that he was taking from so much love and cherishing, was he strong enough to bear its weight; had he not been daring to venture upon such a charge? What was the life into which he had invited her to enter, saying in the words of the old verses:

“Come live with me and be my love!”

He walked slowly, almost sadly, and almost sadly arrived at home with his great happiness.

He said nothing during the evening, but listened, as was his custom, with a kind of patient sympathy, better than much speech, to all the wants, wishes, opinions, and fancies, gathered up by his sisters during the day.

He left them early, saying he was going to find Albert; and when he had closed the door, looked back and called Marian. She went to him wondering, yet not suspecting.

“I want to tell you that I am going to be married, Marian,” he said gently; “are you glad or sorry?”

“I hardly know,” she said in a startled voice. “Oh, John!”

“ Dear Marian,” he said, stooping and kissing her, “ it shall never make any difference with you, be sure of that, you and all of you. Tell the others ; and tell them, too,” he added, with a faint smile, “ that to-morrow they may ask me what they please. I could not bear to talk of it to-night.”

He shook hands with her, enjoined secrecy, and hurried away.

Marian returned to her sisters with a look of solemn thought. The eight eyes were fixed eagerly upon her, and “ Well !” at last burst from all but Rachel.

“ John is going to be married,” she said, in her matter-of-fact way ; “ he told me to tell you so.”

“ Good gracious !” screamed Jessie and Henrietta.

Rachel and Margaret, though instinct-

ively they had felt what was coming, seemed paralysed by the news.

Oh! good gracious!" repeated Jessie; "but I knew it, I knew it! Didn't I know it? Didn't I tell you all from the very first minute that John was in love? Didn't I tell him that he wouldn't answer me? I saw it, I saw it! And now I shall always know that I see what is right."

"Do be quiet, Jessie," said Margaret, petulantly tapping her arm. "We don't care who said it. The dreadful thing is come, and what is to become of us?"

"He says we shall never know the difference," Marian said, more softly than was usual to her; "he kissed me and said it."

Rachel and Margaret looked at her with tremulous lashes, as if they had

heard John's own earnest voice reassuring them.

"But that was nonsense," said Henrietta. "Everybody with common sense knows that a man with a wife and family cannot be like a single man without any cares. I know he will be kind, but it must make a *very* great difference."

"It must, Henrietta," Rachel said, earnestly; "but we must never let John know that we think so."

Margaret shook her head despairingly. She had begged him to marry, it is true, but the reality broke down her fancied heroism.

"In some ways John is right," observed Jessie; "it will make no difference, except a good one. Of course he will be as rich as rich; and then there will be Mrs. Leicester (how funny it sounds!) to

take us out. And then, as Miss Osborne is so very much liked, I dare say we shall be liked too. Upon the whole, though it will be a dreadful nuisance, I think I shall like John to be married very much. I wonder what he said when he proposed? I wonder what she said? *How* I should like to know! I wonder whether he knelt down and kissed her hand? or whether that is all gone out? I shall certainly ask him what he did. Oh, dear! how I do wish I had got somebody to kneel to me!"

"Don't be such a goose, Jessie," said Margaret, ferociously.

"John told me to tell you all that you might ask him what you pleased to-morrow. He seemed a little anxious to-night. I wonder," Marian continued, after a moment's thought, "where he means to

live, and whether he will have a large establishment?"

Jessie was the only one who was able to enter on this question with her; and while the other three sat absorbed in thought, they settled John's house and household to their heart's content; Jessie on a scale of extraordinary magnificence; Marian, with a constant dread of extravagance and debt, making reductions in Jessie's proposals.

CHAPTER XI.

“ World, world, oh ! world,
But that thy strange mutations make us tremble,
Life would not yield to age.”

King Lear.

LEICESTER called in Park Lane early the following day ; but Mr. Osborne was out, and as the restrictions regarding secrecy were still in force, his visit was only moderate in its duration. He fancied Mrs. Osborne looked grave as she sat, a mute, impassive spectator, with him and her daughter ; but Violet was in her gayest spirits. She made him tell her all his sisters had said, and half archly, half shyly alluding to his old reproofs for

her attentions, asked his leave to be a good sister to them in the future. He had never seen her more fascinating, and yet that wayward thing, the human heart, his human heart, was not satisfied. That timid, trusting softness of the previous day was not there; she was herself; bright, kind, feeling, thoughtful; but self-possessed and confident. He knew that she was all to *him*; he could not feel that *he* was all to *her*. He went to his usual business with a weight upon his spirits, he could neither explain nor understand.

In the course of the day Albert visited him, and asked him with a look of great uneasiness if he had seen Mr. Osborne. Leicester replied in the negative. Albert looked about him as if to make sure there was no listener, and then told him

that he was afraid there was something wrong in the bank. He hardly knew what, or to what extent, or what would be the event if such a thing happened as a run on the bank; but he heard it was likely, and some said the bank would close the following day.

Leicester thought of Mr. Osborne's strange looks and words, and felt that it was true; nay, was scarcely startled, so much had the oppression on his spirits prepared him for some impending evil. But he thought of Violet, and trembled.

Albert left him, enjoining silence, and promising to bring him intelligence after he had been to Park Lane.

"I don't believe it myself," he said, as he left the room, "it would be much too bad to be true. Poor Violet! it would kill *her*—that I know."

Albert's news when he returned was not good, although he had nothing to tell. He was certain Mrs. Osborne was very anxious about something, but when he asked her if she was ill, she had replied "Oh! no" much more shortly than was common to her. But Albert's own mind had been diverted by hearing from Violet, whom he had not seen the night before, of her engagement. He congratulated Leicester with all his heart, and told him that in his opinion it was Violet who ought to be congratulated. He had told her so, and she had fully agreed.

A night and a morning passed by in wearing anxiety, and then the blow fell. It was known far and wide that Mr. Osborne was ruined. The bank in which he was a partner had closed. Such

things have been too common to need many words.

There had been during the autumn a time of great pressure in the commercial world; but this bank, one of long standing and excellent repute, had weathered the storm. It was now, when the sky was clearing, that the unexpected blow fell. It is only as regards the actors in this tale that the circumstances must be recalled.

Mr. Osborne met the crisis with a resignation that was half-Christian, half-philosophical, and wholly manly. When, after the first panic, it was found that there had been no rash doings among the more efficient partners (Mr. Osborne had always been more devoted to every other man's business than to his own); that the funds were nearly sufficient to

meet the demands, and that beyond those who naturally must bear the brunt of the day, the sufferers would be few, he evinced a composure and judgment which commanded the respect and confidence of all parties. He was a man of strict integrity and an honourable mind, and disgrace would have overwhelmed him. Relieved from this dread, he prepared himself to bear his misfortune with courage. One thought only unmanned him, and that was his daughter.

Mrs. Osborne never had any thoughts of herself. She sympathised with her husband and child in their troubles as she had done in their joys, and, so sympathising, had hardly time to realise the greatness of the change, to them or to herself. She went from one to the other, with her soft words and soothing manner,

and was miserable only in their grief.

But Violet the resignation shown by her parents was not to be found in her. She was at first stunned by the violence of the shock, and when she realised what had befallen her, every moment added fuel to the anguish of her feelings. In prosperity she had been a spoiled child, unspoilt; unselfish, dutiful, generous, and thoughtful; but adversity came, and found her unprepared, and she fell.

Let none harshly judge her. There are many unknown lands on earth, and those of mental trial are as unsounded by the inexperienced as the pathless sea, or the untrodden desert. We may wonder at the faltering steps of others, as they climb some hill of difficulty, or wade through some slough of despond; but

until we have walked in the same path, we cannot tell that ours would be stronger. Violet had been shielded not only from every breath of trial, but even from the fancy of such a breath. A too fond love and cherishing care had averted not from her eyes only, but her thoughts, every picture of the instability of mortal things. She had heard of want and poverty coming to others suddenly like an armed man; but that there were dangers of such mutability in her lot had been hidden from her eyes. As men of this generation had heard of wars and rumours of wars, but knew not till war in its horror was amongst them what was the meaning of the word, so Violet had heard of the changes of mortal life, but thought not of them till they came upon *her*.

She behaved unlike herself, and most unlike a heroine. Self-possession, confidence, hopefulness were gone; and, as a child, whose eyes have no power to look beyond the present, abandons itself to childish grief, so the present anguish blinded her eyes, dulled her powers of mind, and overwhelmed her.

In the first shock of her grief, she begged her mother to write a note to Leicester, telling him she was incapable of seeing him, and desiring him to leave her to herself.

Such a message was no surprise to him, and he obeyed it. He knew that she was all to him, but he knew he was not all to her. She would have shared prosperity with him, but he was not that friend who was sufficient for her in adversity. He knew it, felt it, and his

love shrank backwards into his heart.

The first two days Violet passed on her bed. Excess of agitation and bitter weeping affected her body as well as her mind, and she lay speechless and immoveable. Her mother hung over her, and kissed and bathed her burning forehead, and murmured her soft words of comfort; but Violet would not be comforted; would not, because her sense of wretchedness made words of common comfort hateful to her. Had some strong man stood by her bedside, and startled her by pointing out the sinfulness and selfishness of her conduct, she would probably have risen up abashed and ashamed; but her mother's gentle truisms and tender sympathy did not reach her ear. She felt a misery beyond their comfort; a load of grief none knew but herself. It was

the loss of *all* to her; *all* that made life happy. She might be ashamed to say it in words, but she felt it in her burning, beating heart.

On the third day the body began to revive, and the restless mind could no longer be confined to one place. She was forced to move about, to creep about the house she no longer dared to look upon; and once roused, the future began to force itself upon her thoughts. There *was* a future, and she must decide what that future should be.

In the dusk of the day she was sitting absorbed in gloomy thought, when her mother approached her and kissed her.

"How are you now, darling?" she said gently.

Violet sighed and made no answer.

Mrs. Osborne put her cool hand on her forehead.

"It burns still, dear," she said softly ;
"had you not better lie down again?"

"No, mamma. I can't lie down any more, my head is well enough. I must think now. Think," she repeated despondingly.

"I think, dearest, we must see Mr. Leicester soon, must we not?" Mrs. Osborne said soothingly. "Albert says"

"Albert does not know. It must be left to me," she replied petulantly.

"Yes, dear, not till you are quite able, but we must think of him when you can."

Violet sighed deeply but made no inquiry and no reply.

Her mother stood timidly by her for

a moment, and then held a note before her eyes.

“He has written to you, dearest, but there is no need to trouble yourself to answer it at present. No one is waiting.”

A glow, not a blush, but a glow of agitation flushed her face. She took the note quickly and looked at it, then laid it beside her, and sat again absorbed in her gloomy thoughts.

Mrs. Osborne sighed, and turned away. Violet had never named Leicester, except to request his absence ; but she had hoped thus to rouse her to life again.

Violet heard her mother sigh, and her heart smote her. She rose suddenly, ran after her, and, putting her arms round her, exclaimed,

“Oh ! mamma, I am a curse to you,

and not a comfort ; but you should have taught me better things ; you should not have suffered me to put my whole happiness in this world's goods."

"You do not, dearest," said her mother softly ; "you are too noble for that. The shock has startled you, but it is but for a short time ; and then, with youth, and hope, and love, you will be happy again."

Violet shook her head and returned to her place and her meditations. After a time she took up Leicester's letter, and inspected it. She seemed to shrink from reading it, and it was only with an effort that at last it was read. When she had done she laid it down with a sigh of relief.

The letter contained only these few words : —

“I have not intruded upon you, and will not till I have your permission. I can imagine what you feel. If in any way I can be of use to Mr. Osborne, need I say that I am at his command? God bless you!

“JOHN LEICESTER.”

It was not much for a first love letter; it was cold and constrained enough; but Leicester had read Violet truly, and dared approach no nearer; cold though it might be, she was comforted by it.

Before she left the room she went to her mother and said,

“I will see Mr. Leicester, mamma.”

“That is right, dear, for he will expect it. When shall it be? Will you write to him?”

“No, mamma, you must write. Say I will see him soon. He shall hear when. Very soon—as soon as I feel able.”

Violet would have been indeed unlike herself if her own self had long absorbed her. She was already beginning to awake, and before many hours she had completely awakened. That night the change in her father's face attracted her attention. For the first time since the shock, she sat with her father and mother and Albert alone, like their own selves; no change as yet, except in the grave, sad faces. Her father lay back in his usual chair, with his eyes closed; Violet saw he was not sleeping, and once she saw a single tear roll down his cheek. It was dashed off instantly, with a furtive glance at her, and she

guessed that *she* had caused that tear. The sight brought hope and comfort with it; she had something yet to live for—something yet to do; and a gleam of brightness flashed over the future, and diffused vigour and courage into her body and mind. She went to bed early, for she was in want of rest; and when she wished her father “good night,” she spoke some of the thoughts that occupied her.

“My dearest papa, I have been a bad daughter to you,” she said, twice kissing his brow; “you have cared for me, and I have had little care for you. But now we must change, and you must let me comfort you. I *will* be a comfort to you, and we will still be happy!”

Poor Mr. Osborne was broken down by

her words ; he tried to smile and speak, but in vain, and could only softly pat her hand, and kiss her again and again.

Albert followed her out of the room, with tears in his eyes.

“I say, Violet,” he said, catching hold of her, “you all make me so wretched I could cry like a baby. What’s come to the world, I wonder, to have all this misery in it?”

Violet sighed again, and from her soul. The momentary hope had disappeared, and she saw only the gloom around her.

“It is as bad for you as for us, Albert,” she said at last ; “I am very sorry for you.”

“Never mind me. I must exert my-

self, that is all; but it is as miserable a business as ever I heard of in my life. And, Violet, that poor Leicester, when”

“Leave him to me,” she said, with sharpness; “I will not be dictated to.”

“I don’t want to dictate. I only say, don’t try the poor fellow more than he can bear. He is as unhappy as we are, Violet.”

“He need not be,” she said, coldly; “good night, dear Albert. I wonder if your head aches as mine does; or if there are many poor heads in the world that seem to have live coals within them, as mine has.”

“A good many, I dare say, if all came to be known,” he said, gravely;

“but good night, Violet, and sleep if you can, for you . make my heart ache.”

CHAPTER XII.

“The wise and active conquer difficulties
By daring to attempt them.”

Rowe.

LEICESTER went about his business during these days of uncertainty and trial, and listened to his sisters' wants and wishes as usual; but there was a devouring fire within him. The pangs of wounded love tortured him; Violet had become all to him, and he was nothing to her. Nor was this all; the future was in every way a place of uncertainty and dread. He had taken on himself new relations, in the confidence that they in no way op-

posed his duty to his sisters, and *now* opposition had arisen. Love, if it was to be successful, warred with duty.

In vain he walked alone and meditated, in vain he sat alone and meditated; in his uncertainty regarding Violet's feelings for him, he could come to no conclusion. In vain his sisters' eyes—some compassionately, some curiously, some anxiously—rested upon him; he could not speak, for he had nothing to tell. He was Violet's betrothed husband, but he was shut out like a stranger.

It was a want of spirit, some may say, to be thus shut out; a lover of spirit would have forced his way in, in spite of displeasure; but to force his way was not in Leicester's nature. He had his pride—it was wounded pride that was torturing him now—but he was too humble,

too distrustful of his claims, to press a claim that was not acknowledged.

On the fourth evening after the change of circumstances, having dined with his sisters, he left them early, unable to endure the turmoil of his thoughts in their society.

“I am not very good company just now,” he said, smiling kindly; “but you will be good-natured enough to excuse me.”

He nodded a good-night, and closed the door quickly, to shut out any reply.

“This is a very disagreeable state of things,” Jessie remarked, with fretfulness. “If we knew what it was all about, I should not mind; but it is a dreadful nuisance to have a person looking as John does, and not to know what it means.”

“I am sure I was unhappy enough when I thought John was going to be married,” Margaret said, leaning her head on her hands; “and now I would give the world to have that day back again. How one’s feelings do change in this world! It is enough to teach one never to fret about things.”

“I feel like you, Margaret,” said Henrietta; “I lay awake then thinking how dull we should be; and now I should be quite glad to have the dulness. How ever a marriage is to be managed now, I can’t conceive! People cannot live on air, however much in love they may be.”

“It must require very great management, certainly,” said Marian; “and I should not fancy that Miss Osborne was fit for that.”

“I hate the Osbornes,” Margaret said

suddenly with flashing eyes. "They do not treat John as he ought to be treated; that is, Miss Osborne does not. When a woman has gone and gained a man's whole heart she ought to feel it a great responsibility, and not treat it like a light thing. I know John has not been considered, for I am sure he would tell us if he knew anything; and I know he has not seen her, because I asked him to-day; he tried to answer, 'Not yet,' as if it was natural; but I saw his poor face, how it looked!"

"But, my dear Margaret," Rachel said gently, "you should consider Miss Osborne too. It would be a dreadful thing if *we* were ruined; I dare say we hardly know what we should do; but to Miss Osborne, who has been more like a princess than

anything else, it must be far worse. No doubt she is too bewildered to know how she acts."

"If I was ruined a thousand times over," Margaret replied undauntedly, "I should feel for the man who cared for me."

"And so should I," said Jessie. "I should remember that I had got love left to comfort me, and then I should not so much care about money."

Margaret looked very fierce at this *fade* repetition of her sentiment, but being really unhappy about Leicester, allowed it to pass without a strife.

That night, when all her sisters were gone to their rooms, Rachel softly opened her door, and watched for Leicester. Henrietta and Jessie had a room on the drawing-room floor, preferring to be together; Rachel, Marian and, Margaret had

rooms on the second floor, and Leicester had a large room on the floor (that was not an attic) above. When he came home, and went up with heavy strides to his room, she crept after him. But it was so unusual a thing to do, that she paused breathlessly outside his closed door, and was still breathless, when she timidly and almost noiselessly knocked and entered.

He was standing by the fire, leaning his arms on the low chimney-piece, already in an attitude of thought; but he turned quickly round and said,

“Is that you, Rachel? Do you want anything?”

“Yes,” she replied, still breathless with the effort of putting herself forward; “I am come because I want to speak to you.”

“Then speak,” he said kindly. “There,” and he put her into a chair near the fire, “will that do? What is it, dear Rachel? Do you want my advice, or help, or what?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head and recovering herself at the tone of the kind friendly voice. “*I* do not want advice; I want to give it.”

The kind friendly look vanished, and a grave shadow came in its place.

“Is it me you wish to advise?” he asked. “I do not want advice. I do not need it.”

“I am not sure,” she replied again, breathless. “I think you do.”

“In what way? Speak out, dear Rachel. I am very willing to hear.”

“I do not think you consider us and our wishes enough,” she said hurriedly.

“You like to give up all to us, and you do not consider that we may wish to give up to you. You have lived for us all your life long, and you do not remember that now we should be and are willing to live for you. You do not mean it, dear John, but it is unjust and unkind.”

“My dear Rachel,” he said, turning gravely towards her from the fireplace, and fixing his eyes on her excited face, “what would you have me do?”

“Marry !” she exclaimed, the word escaping with strange force from her lips. “I think I see what thoughts are troubling you. I know that worldly cares are pressing on you ; but let me speak for once. Do not let thoughts for us disturb you. Make a home for *her* ; for them all, if you will. It may not be a rich one, but

it will be a home; and if that home must make us poorer, do not grudge to let us, for once, and for a time, do what you have been doing all your life. We may have something to give up, but trust us, me and all, that it will be the happiest day of our lives to do it."

He stooped and silently kissed her, without a word of thanks.

"You may be right, dear Rachel," was all his reply; "and if it should be right, though it might break my heart I will not forget what you have said."

She thanked him, and then wishing him good night, stole from the room, and softly crept down stairs. But softly as her visit had been effected, it had not escaped the ears of her sisters, and before she reached her own door every door was thrown open, and Jessie, in a

white dressing-gown, was half up stairs, to see what the matter was.

“What has happened, Rachel?” asked Marian. “Has John anything to communicate?”

“Oh! do tell us, do tell us!” cried Jessie, flying up higher, followed by Henrietta in the distance. “Is Miss Osborne coming to live with us? or has she had a legacy? or is it all come straight? or has it all gone wrong? and don’t John mean to marry? or”

“There is nothing,” Rachel said hurriedly. “I know nothing.”

“Then what were you doing at this time of night?” asked Marian.

“There is a mystery! I know there is a mystery!” cried Jessie. “We heard you go up to his room; didn’t we, Henrietta? and we know you have been

talking together; and we *must* know what he says; we have a right to know what he says. We are all his sisters quite as much as you."

"Now, Jessie, have done," said Margaret, stepping forward. Perhaps in the hope of something being betrayed, she had hitherto stood silent. "I will not have Rachel pestered."

"You have no business to interfere; has she Marian?" Jessie said.

"Yes, I have. It is my business to see justice done in this house. Is it not a shame to think that one sister cannot speak to her brother without being set upon in this way? We had all much better go to bed."

"But I know you were watching till Rachel came down, Margaret; because I heard your door open very soon after she went up."

After saying this, Henrietta retired to her room.

Margaret coloured, and said, quickly:

“It is a good thing that I do keep watch, or I believe Rachel would have been eaten up. And now, good night.”

She stood with a look of defiance at her door, till every sister slowly glided away and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ We twain have met like ships upon the sea,
Who hold an hour’s converse, so short, so sweet,
One little hour, and then away they speed
On lonely paths, through mist, and cloud, and foam,
To meet no more.”

The Life Drama.

LEICESTER heard from Mrs. Osborne the next morning. She gave a message from Violet, simply begging to see Leicester on the afternoon of the following day; and always kind and gentle, added from herself that she was sure he had suffered much anxiety on their account, and that she had felt for him.

Unable to bear the torture of his

sisters' looks during the next thirty hours of uncertainty, Leicester wished them good-bye, with an intimation that he should sleep out of town; and having calmed and strengthened himself by those hours of solitary reflection, proceeded at the appointed time to the house in Park Lane. He had thought much on Rachel's words, and was resolved if an opening was given, to act upon them. It did, as he had expressed it to her, break his heart to be the one to cause his sisters poverty or loss; but in his silent reflections he felt there might be a pride of duty—to be vanquished like all other kinds of pride—and he submitted himself to the necessity laid upon him.

He was shown into the drawing-room, and very quickly Violet came to him there. At the very first glance, he saw

how much she was changed. Some countenances, especially when the features themselves are finely formed, look as lovely or even lovelier in dejection and melancholy; but it was not so with Violet. Her features had been so animated by the light, and warmth, and good-will within, that they seemed to have lost even the beauty of their form now that that inner light was darkened. Their softness and smoothness seemed to be hardened into a stern composure, and her dark blue eyes, which once, without metaphor, did shine like stars, were now as dull and heavy as a stormy cloud.

Leicester saw the change in the very first glance, and, unable to argue on its cause, seeing only the change which a few days' sorrow had made, was about to

spring forward—all self forgotten, all the strife between love and duty to his sisters forgotten—to spring forward, lost in one feeling of love and compassion for her, when a second gaze arrested him. That second gaze revealed not the change only, but a something *in* the change that awed and chilled him; he paused, while the spring of love welled slowly backwards into the recesses of his heart.

They met calmly, coldly, and silently; and with a slight movement Violet directed him to a chair. He sat down and said nothing. He saw the expected moment was come. He was nothing to her; and he would not, by one forward word or movement, lay a claim upon her, or add to the troubled passions of her mind.

It might have been but one minute.

It seemed to him ten before she spoke. Her lips parted twice before any sound was heard, and when she did speak, it was hurriedly.

“There has been such a change, Mr. Leicester, as I never contemplated; and in that change everything, all relations and engagements of life are changed. It is well to face the truth at once.”

It was what he had expected. The engagement between them was dissolved. He knew it; he had known it from the glance of her eye and the touch of her hand; but he could not speak. He heard it in silence, only steadfastly gazing at her, to hear all her will.

She had expected a word; perhaps in her innermost heart, in the unconscious mysteries of the mind, had expected a

denial, and more hurriedly and passionately she went on :

“It is right to look things in the face. I am no longer what I was. My hopes in life are changed ; my duties are changed. I cannot be a wife now ; I must be a daughter, and a daughter only. Life has become very dark, but I think if I am *free*,” and she drew a deep breath, as if shaking herself from a chain that galled her, “I shall be strong enough to bear it.” She stopped again, and a second time sighed a sigh, of relief rather than of sorrow.

Leicester spoke at last. “All your will shall be done,” he said, in a low but steady voice. “We are free. Henceforward we travel on alone.”

There was a something in the tone of his voice which made Violet’s heart ache

and throb, and then die ; a something that faintly told the love he bore her, the love and sympathy she was rejecting ; but though the voice spoke, the words were unimpassioned and cold. She offered freedom, and it was accepted without one effort to bind her. Her proud spirit felt it, and at the bidding of her proud spirit the fluttering heart was stilled.

“ He does not want a poor wife,” she inwardly said, with a kind of passionate coldness, and she became strong again at the thought.

They were free, and they sat opposite to each other free ; free and cold and silent.

“ You, have suffered much, and are much changed,” at last Leicester gravely said.

Proud tears flashed in her eyes, and she said bitterly,

“We are badly taught. If we were taught in youth that human life is subject to change like this, we should not set our hearts on any earthly thing. I shall do so no more.”

“You are young,” he said, “to live and have no heart in the world. I shall wish you better things.”

Her heart ached again. There was no passion in his calm voice, but it touched some chord which for the moment seemed to strain almost to breaking.

She shook her head, but said nothing.

There was a pause, and then Leicester began in the same tone, and pursuing the same train of thought :

“When the violence of the shock is over, you will wake up as in a new

life, and I know you well enough to be sure that you will give, and therefore find happiness, as you have hitherto done.”

“I shall have no power to give,” she interrupted, in the bitter passionate tone in which she had last spoken; “the spring is dry.”

“Oh! Violet,” he said, unconsciously calling her by the name which for many months had made a ceaseless strain of music in his heart, “are your thoughts so poor as to think money alone can bless? You have still yourself, and the good heart God has given you. I shall hear of you,” he continued, after another moment’s pause, “I know I shall, the friend, the comforter, the help of many! When the eye sees it will bless you, when the ear hears it will leap for joy.”

Softer tears trembled in Violet's eyes. She shook her head, but it was more gently; and there was a passing away of pride, for the moment at least, when she said,

"Why do you say 'hear?' We shall still be friends."

"No, Violet," he said, with a grave and melancholy dignity, "I cannot be a friend. We part; henceforward we travel on alone. Some men might bear to be friends, to live by the ashes of a fire that is gone out; but I cannot. We are free, and we must part."

Violet sat paralysed in heart and soul. Vaguely, dimly, she saw in the far future the blank, if a blank *can* be seen, she felt the aching void, if a void *can* be felt, which the loss of his love would make; in the long vista of future years

she saw, dimly indeed, yet saw it still, the cravings and longings of her heart for a something which she was wilfully casting away; but she saw and felt, and was dumb. She had done the deed, she had set him free, and, suffer as she might, she would not ask again the love she had rejected.

There was another long pause, and then Leicester slowly rose.

“What must be, should be quickly done,” he said, approaching her. “I will not distress you with many words of parting. God bless you! and in His good time make you happy again. Farewell!”

He took her hand; looked into her startled and troubled eyes; calmly and gently, yet with impulsive movement, pressed his lips on her cheek, and had left the room before she recovered

from the amazed and bewildered trance into which his sudden rising had cast her.

She could then have shrieked his name to call on him to return, but the iron hand of pride and the stronger hand of a woman's nature bound her to her seat, and kept her still.

So they parted; and a silent barrier of days, and months, and years grew up between those who, but an hour before, had been bound for life to each other: a barrier caused not by circumstances or God's sending, not by the chances of human life, but by the pride of two hearts.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ Judging of others, we can see too well
Their grievous fall, but not how grieved they fell.”

CRABBE.

THREE days after the final scene between Leicester and Violet, Albert Ellis came to call in Clarges Street. He was shown up into the room where the five sisters were sitting together.

He was not accustomed to be a visitor; except occasionally, when he went in in Leicester's company, and at the door he paused as if scared by the number; but quickly recovering himself, made his way to Margaret, bowing to the others, and shaking hands with her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, drawing a chair to her side, "for intruding in this way, but I want to know what has become of your brother, and a note is so unsatisfactory."

"We are very glad to see you," Margaret said, "for we are *very* dull."

"Can you tell me where Leicester is? His clerk gave me some odd direction. Where is he gone, and what is he doing?"

"We know very little about it. His direction *is* odd. Grumbleton-Thorpe; some place down in Yorkshire. He is gone on business; but we have not seen him since"

She paused.

"Since the end of that affair?" Albert said, nodding his head towards Park Lane.

"Yes."

“What is it all about?” he inquired, leaning forward, and, though speaking aloud, speaking confidentially; “I am completely in the dark. I go to Leicester’s chambers, and I find him gone. I go to Park Lane, and my aunt tells me the marriage is broken off. I ask why, and she does not know, or will not tell. I ask to see Violet, but Violet does not choose to see me. And it is hard, when I have taken such an interest in them all. Will you be more kind, Miss Leicester?”

“I would if I could,” Margaret said, with a half smile at his discontent, “but I really know as little as you do. My sister Marian had a note, a very short one Marian!” she exclaimed, suddenly rising, “will you let Mr. Ellis see John’s note? Do if you can!”

Marian made a little bustle in consenting, but took it from her work-box, and gave it to Margaret. Margaret silently put it into Albert's hands.

It was this. The date was the evening of the day on which he had parted from Violet.

“MY DEAREST MARIAN,

“I know you must all be anxious about my future prospects, and I relieve you as soon as I can. The hopes I have lately indulged are at an end for ever. Few have known they were indulged, and by those few they must be forgotten as if they had never been. It is probably best as it is. Thank you all for your sympathy with my hopes and with my fears; and assist me now by your silence in overcoming vain regrets.

“An offer was made me this day to undertake some business for a gentleman in Yorkshire. It was not unwelcome to me, and I accepted it. I shall be absent about ten days. My direction is Grumbleton-Thorpe. I took my bag, and must beg you to send my portmanteau by to-night’s mail. I am sorry to leave you alone in this dismal weather, but you will understand, I hope, my motives; and on my return, we will begin a new life again. My love to all.

“Your affectionate brother,

“JOHN LEICESTER.”

Albert read the note twice over before he returned it to Margaret, and then sat in meditation.

“What do you think of it?” she asked.

He shook his head.

"May I tell you what *I* think?" she said, a moment afterwards. "I think your cousin has behaved to him shamefully." And her cheeks glowed, and her eyes sparkled as she spoke.

"My dear Margaret!" Rachel exclaimed.

"Don't stop her," Albert said, placidly; "I quite agree with her."

"Do you?" said Margaret; "then I am sorry I said it. I feel only that John is unhappy—no one, not one of us, ever can or ever will know how unhappy—and that she has done it."

"True," Albert replied; "but I pity Violet too."

"So do I," said Rachel, eagerly; "I think she has been wrong, but I think *we* cannot understand or do justice to

her motives. We cannot feel what she is now feeling."

"No," Albert said; "they brought her up to reign over us all, and she cannot understand a fall. Poor thing! you can hardly guess how changed she is."

"I am sure I have felt for her," Margaret said, gravely; "but I cannot forget that she drew John on, and, almost against his will, forced him to love her. She has done a mischief greater than we can any of us know. It is not a question of a young man's foolish love; it is something very different, and I cannot forgive her."

"Why is a young man's love foolish?" asked Albert, in his downright tone.

"I don't care for young men, or what they feel," she said, quickly; "what I care for is John."

“Young men are very much obliged to you,” he said in the same tone.

“Margaret always speaks in that odd way.”

Jessie here put in her word, thinking the conversation was taking a turn of great interest; but Henrietta kicked her foot and disconcerted her, and the subject dropped.

“Well, I am very much obliged to you for shewing me your brother’s letter,” Albert said, slowly rising. “I think I shall write to him, but I suppose the less I say about it all the better. I am very sorry it is all over. Very sorry,” he repeated; “and what a change has come over the world in the last ten days! I don’t feel as if London was the same place. The streets look as black and blank to me as if they had the plague.”

"So they do to me," said Margaret. "I did not know that men had those odd feelings."

"I am very sorry, too, that we are not to be relations," he continued. "I had thought it would be a very comfortable thing. I hope you are sorry too."

"Very," she replied cordially.

He then shook hands with her and Marian, bowed to the others, and went away.

"Do you know, Margaret," Jessie said, after sitting for about five minutes in profound thought, "it came into my head just now that perhaps Mr Ellis is in love with you."

"And do you know, Jessie," Margaret cried with one of her most ferocious looks, "that if ever you make such a remark again, I will beat you into twenty thousand pieces."

"I only said *perhaps*," said Jessie submissively.

"I like Mr Ellis," Margaret boldly observed, turning to Rachel; "he does seem so very sorry for John."

"I wish he had told us about Mr Osborne's affairs," said Marian. "I was longing to ask, but he addressed himself so entirely to Margaret, I was afraid of being considered impertinent."

"I saw just now in the *Times* an advertisement for the sale of the house in Park Lane," observed Henrietta." "I was longing to ask about it too, but I was not sure if it would be discreet."

"The house sold!" exclaimed Jessie; oh! how ever will they bear to live in a street, after looking out into the Park all their lives!"

"People in Mr Osborne's situation can-

not choose," said Marian wisely. "They will be fortunate if they have *any* house of their own."

"You don't mean they are going to the workhouse?" asked Jessie in consternation.

"Nonsense!" said Henrietta. "But I do wish we knew something. I *cannot* think of Miss Osborne poor."

The surmises regarding Mr Osborne's future plans were not confined to the house in Clarges Street. All the world who knew him longed to know what he would do, and many excellent plans were laid out for him by his friends and acquaintance.

He was not left by any means destitute. When the affairs of the bank were wound up, so little loss was sustained by the creditors, that every partner retired with an unspotted reputation, and might, with

a clear conscience, enjoy what was left to him in life. To Mr. Osborne, £500 a-year, the property of his wife, settled upon herself and her children, remained. It necessitated a change great and strange, for the affluent and luxurious banker; but it was not destitution.

When this became known, many excellent schemes were, as has been said, laid out for Mr. Osborne's future. An honest man of business habits is, it was argued, at all times a desirable thing; and the fancy of his friends very shortly settled him in a smaller but comfortable house, with some remunerative employment, bringing in at least a thousand a-year. With £1500 a-year, they argued,—the imaginary one thousand soon growing into a reality,—his small family could be supplied with every luxury, and Miss Osborne would shortly

appear again as cheerful and lovely as ever.

The kind feeling inspired by the misfortunes of the Osbornes, and the popularity they had enjoyed, gave great zest to these speculations on their behalf, and this pleasant settlement of their affairs was a real repose to many compassionate minds. When, therefore, the announcement of Mr. Osborne's real plans broke upon the world, it caused not a surprise only, but a shock. The announcement consisted in the news that Mr. Osborne and his family intended to retire to some remote village, and there live in obscurity upon the small income that remained to them.

The speculations had caused much conversation. Disapprobation and astonishment caused still more. It was a most ill-judged step; it withdrew Mr. Osborne

from the sphere of usefulness ; it was hard upon Mrs. Osborne ; it was tyranny to his daughter. The latter grew at length to be the prevalent complaint. Few could picture the lovely and brilliant Violet, the frequenter and favourite of society, buried in an obscure village ; and Mr. Osborne, the kindest of men, the fondest of fathers, and well known in those characters, bore for many weeks the stigma of most unfatherly selfishness.

But meanwhile the plan was Violet's own.

“ Oh ! for a lodge in some vast wilderness ! ” This was her sole desire, a spot where she might hide her humbled head.

After her parting with Leicester, after one paroxysm of despair, indulged in

solitude, and concealed from all observation, she fell into an apathy, a kind of mechanical life, from which no caresses of her father, no soft words from her mother, could rouse her. Her life spread out before her under so black a cloud, the future seemed so utterly stripped of all that could give it beauty, that she had not power to rouse herself even to think. She had lived like a good and happy child in a bright present, and now she was forced into a future which there was not one star to gild.

The first thing that roused her from this apathy was the question about a future abode. The mere question would not have been enough; but when she found that a small house in or near London was contemplated, and chiefly for her sake, she was startled into her own old eager

self at once. Her opinion was given with vehement words ; her persuasion enforced with passionate arguments ; and too happy to rouse her, too happy to please her, and himself acquiescent and interested because she was so, Mr. Osborne put himself into her hands, to be guided at her will.

There are few minds to whom action is not a restorative. To Violet it was as the very breath of life. Roused by the appeal, excited by the responsibility, eager to choose well and happily for her parents' sake, and drawn out of herself by her interest for them, she went forth with animation into new life, and sank back into apathy no more.

It is not uncommon, especially among women, to *cherish* a sorrow, to *indulge* in melancholy ; and, if their sorrow be of a sentimental cast, to feed it with some-

thing of pleasurable emotion; but this can only be the case where the sorrow or regret, though great, is not keen. Melancholy may have pleasurable sensations; but those whose feelings are sharp and keen, suffer too much in their sorrow to wish to *indulge* in it. They escape when they can, and are thankful to escape. This was Violet's case. Her regret for Leicester, now that she had cast his love away, was so sharp and poignant, that, far from indulging it, her desire was to put it aside. It was over; with the rest of the past it was over; and, like the past, must be thought of no more.

Thus she argued, and she acted on her argument. With violent effort regrets were banished; and she began her new life with the vigour of a new being.

“You look quite like your old self to-day,” Albert said to her one afternoon, when he found her vigorously packing. “My dear Violet, I am so glad!”

“Let us blot the word ‘old’ out of our dictionary,” she replied, playfully. “I am like my new self to-day, and not my old one.”

“Do you mean to think of old times no more?” he asked gravely.

“No; no more.”

“I am sorry for that, Violet.”

She made no remark, except to ask him to fetch a parcel she pointed out.

He brought it, and sat down on one of the boxes that stood near.

“You are a very odd woman,” he said at last.

“Am I?” She spoke with a slight laugh.

“A week ago, ten days ago at least, I almost thought you would not live; you had such a look in your face, Violet, I really did begin to think that you would die, and now”

“There is nothing odd in the case,” she said. “*Then* I had not blotted the word ‘old’ out of my dictionary; now I have.”

“Then I think you a very odd woman, and an unfeeling one!”

A look came over her face that contracted it for half an instant; but the emotion was violently withstood, and she said calmly,

“That is not a kind speech, Albert. I suppose we are all *odd* to each other, because no one knows why another acts as he does; you should be more charitable in the use of the word. Odd or

not," she then added resolutely, "I mean to think of old times no more. With me everything shall be new, and oh! how I wish," and she sighed a deep sigh, "that the new things, so far as regards my own conduct at least, could be better than the old!"

"You are a good girl, Violet, though an odd one," Albert said kindly, "I am sorry I have worried you."

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CHAPTER XV.

“How gay the habitations that bedeck
This fertile valley! Not a house but seems
To give assurance of content within;
As if the sunshine of the day were met
By answering brightness in the hearts of all.”

The Excursion.

THE choice of the Osbornes' future place of abode was decided by a mere fancy of Violet's. When about seventeen, she had been on a visit into Devonshire with her father and mother; and in their journey homewards they had passed through a village so prettily situated, that Violet had laughingly said, “When I

retire from the world, this shall be the scene of my retirement."

The circumstance had long been forgotten, the pretty scene apparently obliterated from her memory, but from the depths of memory at this time it suddenly came forth again. One restless night, as she lay half dreaming, half thinking, endeavouring to fix on some one English county for which she had a fancy greater than for others, this forgotten scene flashed vividly before her eyes. She saw again the nests of cottages with their picturesque shapes, the beautiful old church, the almshouses close to the church, in the porches of which ancient men and women sat idle or at work; she saw little dwelling-places, like so many pretty Parsonages embosomed in shrubs, damp perhaps to the possessors, but suggesting

small epithets expressive of comfort, and beauty, and longing to every passer-by; she saw the country, green and wooded and sunny, made up of hill and dale, broken banks and fertile fields. The scene flashed before her with the suddenness and vividness of lightning, and it brought light and hope and pleasure to her sad heart. *There*, in that spot, she felt a power to begin and enjoy life again; *there* she saw visions of days of usefulness and activity, where she, although poor, might once again pour out her kind heart in kindnesses. She could scarcely lie still till morning, and when she greeted her parents with her thought, Albert might well have said, "You look like your old self," so radiant with hope was her countenance.

Too happy to see his daughter in-

terested, Mr Osborne caught eagerly at her suggestion; and that very day an old servant in whom he had confidence was dispatched to the village of Hollywell, on the borders of Dorsetshire and Devonshire, to make inquiries if a house suitable to Mr Osborne's means, and to the necessary comforts of the family, could be procured.

From this time the cloud hung no more on Violet's countenance. When the old servant returned successful, her heart bounded with old joyful feelings, and she felt that she was Violet Osborne once more.

Thus sanguine and hopeful, she bore, herself, and with her devoted love assisted her father and mother to bear, the painful parting with their old home that ensued. None who saw her now could

have guessed that it was the same being who had abandoned herself to selfish sorrow; and she herself forgot, in the blameless present, that there had been aught that was blamable in the past.

In the interval between leaving Park Lane and taking possession of their new abode, Mr. Osborne passed a few weeks at a villa lent him by a friend. Nothing could be more sequestered than the spot, or more secluded than their life; but the house and grounds were furnished and decorated with every beauty and comfort that art and money can give, and both Mr. Osborne and his daughter, fond of art, and fond of literature, found the time too short to examine all that might be examined, and master all that could be seen. It was a time of excitement to the intellect, and in endeavouring to bear

away with her some faint records of the beauties spread before her, Violet had hardly time to sigh that such luxury of taste must be resigned for ever.

It was at the close of a day in the early part of February, that the Osbornes entered their new home. There was a bustle of excitement in the first arrival; there was interest, curiosity, hope, and fear, all alive and eager. There was excitement, and also gratification; the outside, even in the fading light, was picturesque, and what fresh, clean home, lighted with blazing fires, could look otherwise than attractive, after a journey, which, for Mrs. Osborne's sake, had occupied two days, and had been performed in the cramp and cold, and stuffiness of a hired chaise. But the arrival was over, the whole of the small house had been

seen, and Violet was at liberty to think.

It was no pleasant liberty. An unspeakable dreariness stole over her. She was in her new *home*. She was in that spot, the fancy of which had beckoned her so hopefully onward; she was at home again, and at rest; she was to live and enjoy; but the rest and enjoyment would not come at her call. A depression, new in its kind, a depression of eyes, limbs, senses, and faculties, stole over her. The small, low rooms seemed to take away her breath; the narrow dimensions of the house to paralyze her limbs. It seemed as if fancy could never stray, bounded by such limits, or she herself, in such an atmosphere, ever exercise her powers again.

She had begged her mother to rest, and said she would assist in unpacking,

and in looking to the arrangements of the house. She had hoped for, she had gone with zest to the occupation, but there was little to be done. Two old servants, a housemaid and kitchenmaid had from attachment to Violet insisted on accompanying her into retirement, and by their care everything was already well settled. Every effort on Violet's part was forbidden; every endeavour to make herself useful was resisted. *They* did not understand how undesired was their care; they robbed her of all that could have cheered her thoughts, and she had nothing to do but to submit.

Weary of her own room she went down to the drawing-room. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, more indolent than Violet, and at an age when a tedious journey fatigues the body as well as the mind, were lying

back in calm repose on each side of the fire. Candles were not yet brought in, nor the shutters shut, and Violet sat down in the window and endeavoured to peer out. The morning had been bright and frosty, but a mist had lately been gathering, and a small rain was now pattering against the windows. In the west there was a misty streak of red still lingering, and by its light she endeavoured to realise the features of the scene on which she was to look. A grass plot, about ten yards broad, was enclosed by palings and a gate. The palings were twined with evergreens, and tall dark shrubs ornamented the grass. Beyond the palings some large trees waved their leafless branches, and beyond was the dull grey sky.

“I shall never breathe here. I must

have been mad to come," was her thought.

One of the maids brought in candles, and begged her to move while she closed the shutters. She obeyed mechanically, and then resumed her place, almost unconscious that the prospect on which she had been gazing was shut out. By the light of the candle she looked round to examine the faces of her parents, but they both slept, or rested in a repose as deep as sleep, and the countenances of both were placid and content. The rain pattered on, and deeper and deeper grew her despondency, and almost with scorn she contemplated the tranquil faces of her parents.

At last her father roused himself.

"Violet, darling, are you there?" he said.

“Yes, papa,” and she slowly rose.

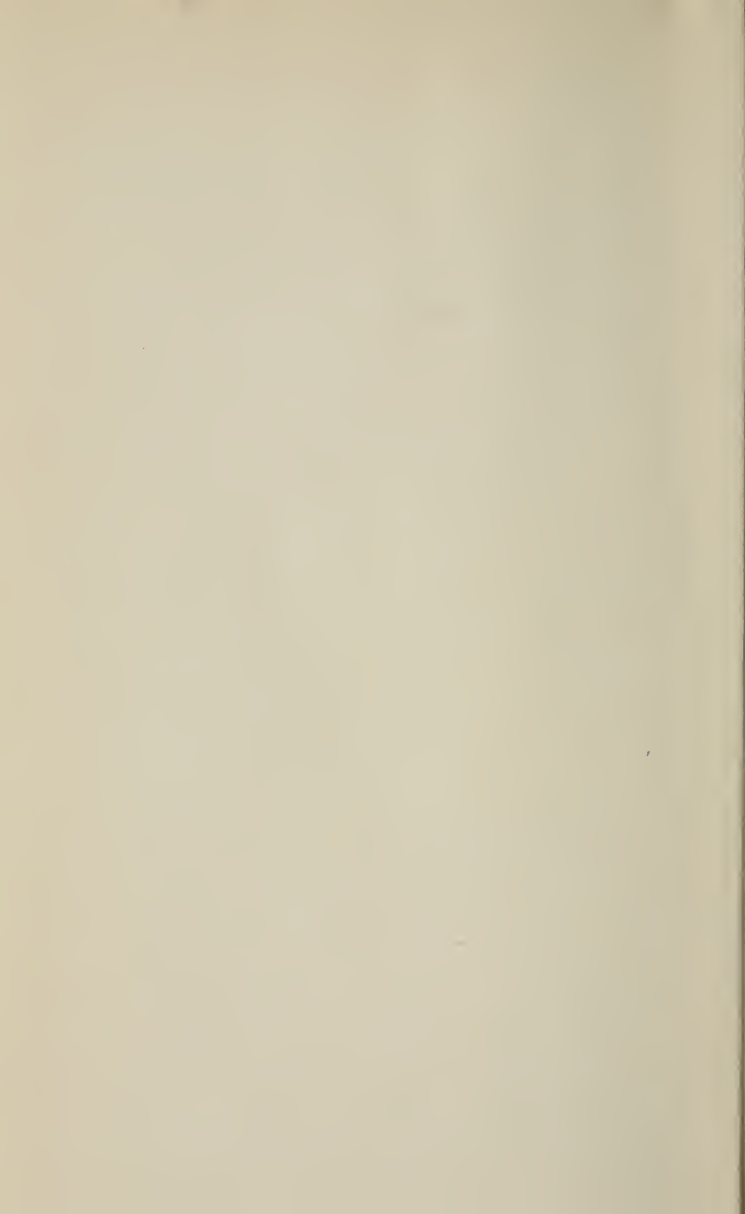
“Will you play us a tune, dear? It will cheer us a little this dull evening.”

With tears in her eyes Violet kissed his brow, and passed on to the piano-forte. Tears of self-reproach. He was dull then as well as she, and she had been thinking only of herself. They were wholesome tears; while she played, they dropped fast, and in falling cleared the atmosphere of her mind from the bad spirit of discontent.

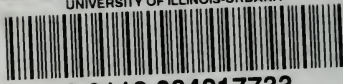
That night as she sat alone and meditated in her room, struggling against the depression that still assailed her, she prayed as she never before had prayed for help against herself—for help not to be weary in the well-doing she had set before her eyes, not to be weary in the

steadfast performance of her filial duty. Her heart was sad, and, for the time being, she felt weak and afraid, and feeling weak, her prayers were earnest, as they had never been. She fell asleep with tears on her lashes, but something of a new-born peace in her heart.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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